The Prophetic Muse: The Didactic Imperative of Gerard Manley Hopkins, R S Thomas, and William Blake

Suzanne Muir Scott
MA Hons (English Language & Literature)
University of St Andrews

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346


There is a Veil outside of Existence, which if entered into
Englobes itself & becomes a Womb, such was Albions Couch
A pleasant Shadow of Repose call'd Albions lovely Land
His Sublime & Pathos become
His Reason his Spectrous
Jerusalem his Emanation
Two Rocks fixed in the Earth
Power covers them above
is a Stone laying beneath
beholds the
Vision of Albion
Half Friendship
As he entered Vala's
The long
is the Door
of Death for Albions
are vast
different Family said Los
there is a Female
Separated

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
... But who is that on the other side of you?

T S Eliot
The Waste Land
V 'What the Thunder said' 359-365

Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyse what the word 'prophetic' means, in practice, and has identified the following as categories of activity within which prophetic endeavour is carried out, viz: compulsion to utter; call and commissioning; prophet as medium; authority; critical function; context; witness; task; sight; revelation; language and rhetorical persuasion; vocation; failure in mission; faithfulness and cost; burden and gift.

An analysis of the prophetic activity and characteristics of some of the Hebrew Bible prophets instigated these criteria and the categories have been applied as a structural methodology to three poets: Gerard Manley Hopkins, R S Thomas, and William Blake, who lived and wrote within three different timeframes. One of these was a Priest, one a Minister, the other neither, but all were in their own unique ways with their prophetic 'poetry of protest' working both within and against organised and structured religion. Within this analysis therefore, this thesis seeks to articulate a *chiasmus* between poetry and prophecy as activities which explore the human realm, and between poets and prophets as inspired individuals working within and against wider society.

The question of both divine revelation to and inspiration of these poet/prophets is a thorny one, and no attempt has been made to 'prove' the existence of these forces other than to accept, according to the personal testimony that has been left to us, the writers' experience of the *a priori* nature of these phenomena and their active presence within the articulation of vision.

This exploration seeks to locate prophetic poetry within an already-existing arena where other interpreters have trodden, and accordingly the Chapter One Introduction reviews some ways in which others have approached the subject. However, with a grounding intention – an analysis in Chapter Two of some of the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible – this thesis carries the connection forward from other approaches into its own territory and seeks to locate prophetic utterance and prophetic characteristics within an identifiable and imposable structure of activity which could be applied to writers outwith the biblical canon, projecting the phenomenon of prophecy into the literary realm. Accordingly, Chapters Three, Four, and Five endeavour to analyse the ways in which the poets here discussed could be designated as prophets.

Overall, the thesis proposes that there exists an underlying *solum* of prophecy as a diachronic phenomenon that can arise in synchronic form within ongoing human timescales, with the object of interjecting 'truths' by way of individual voices in specific times, *from* the eternal and ideal realm *into* the temporal and real world, in order to leave behind didactic imperatives to us that challenge and change our perspective and therefore our behaviour.

I dedicate this thesis to
Bill and Pearl Scott
the finest people I ever knew.

Geography

We were just on the edge
of the map right
at the edge of paradise
where the birds were
peacocks flying and the
capull coille strutted
black and red against the
lawn - it taught me
to be phoenix, to burn
on the hottest pyre and be
reborn, it taught me
beauty and flying
into the sun, it taught me
the fragrance of mountain
air, pure snows, it taught
me antlers and repose.
Ever at the line of
sight it beckons,
enticing and afar, as if
I never could reach the
portal there, once gone
and slipped through the
hand like grain unplanted
it faded into the west
and in that sad
barque reduced to
a faded memory of green
that upheld the dark.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor David Jasper and Dr Donald Mackenzie for their input and advice; Derek and Catriona Gomez for being the best of friends, particularly when I needed them most; Deborah Tritton and E Joy Clancy for much-valued friendship and hospitality; Alexander J Cuthbert, especially, for everything.

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Unless otherwise stated, G M Hopkins' quotes are taken from The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (4th edn) Eds. W H Gardner & N H Mackenzie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967. This is abbreviated to 'Gardner' throughout.

R S Thomas is normally quoted from the Collected Poems (1945-1990). London: J M Dent, 1993. This is far from being a 'Collected Poems', as it is a selection only, edited from Thomas' individual collections which were published within the noted timescale. Individual volumes outwith this 'Collected' have been accessed in so far as these were available, many being out of print at time of writing. Quotes have also been taken from Thomas' Selected Poems, published in 1973 but only covering the period from 1946-68. Later Poems only covers the years 1972-82, and was published in 1983, following which Thomas had a further 10 individual collections published.

Quotes used for the chapter on William Blake were taken from William Blake: The Complete Poems. Ed. Alicia Ostriker. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977. This was deemed to be the most accessible text, as against the Erdman, Longman, or Keynes editions of Blake's poetry. Blake's visual representations were sourced from William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000 (hereinafter cited as Thames & Hudson); and Robin Hamlyn & Michael Phillips' edition William Blake. London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 2000 (hereinafter cited as Tate Gallery). The latter was chosen for personal reasons, because I attended the Blake exhibition at the Tate Britain, Christmas 2000.

Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotes are taken from: The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1989.

Preface

In all of the texts and sources researched I found few other writers who advance the verifiable possibility that the phenomenon of prophecy might exist within a literary context outwith the bounds and authority of the Hebrew Bible (excluding of course the New Testament where Christ himself fulfils the criteria for being a prophet). The one source which I came across that I felt went any way towards supporting my approach was Tannenbaum's: Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art, particularly Chapters One through Four. My own methodology, outlined in detail in Chapter Two, analyses what I have identified as being the main criteria upon which the phenomenon, characteristics, and vocation of prophecy rest. In subsequent chapters, Three, Four and Five, I have applied these criteria to three different poets who were living and working within three different 'ages' of man, in the case of Hopkins the nineteenth century, for Thomas the twentieth, and in Blake's case the eighteenth.

All three were working within times which held differing and changing views of God. None of them worked within or were privy to the Theocratic world out of which the ancient prophets spoke. In spite of this, the perspectives on the world which these three idiosyncratic writers advance, comprise an idea of God which has connection with and in many ways inherits the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible: a 'double' God of both dark and light, of Tyger as well as Lamb.

The phenomenon of inspiration connects with ideas of the prophetic and the poetic and all of the poets here considered believe they were 'inspired' to write. The ancient idea of 'the Muse' as inspirer finds elements of commonality with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the former deriving its mythical origins from Hesiod's Muse of Parnassus. The title of this thesis: 'The Prophetic Muse' is therefore a conflation of disparate 'man-made' labels for a real, but puzzling, and ultimately unclassifiable phenomenon that writers through the ages have testified to and considered authentic.

Prophetic poetry becomes a didactic act when the poet is compelled to pass on to us a unique vision, and to command us as inheritors of words, to both listen and learn. The didactic imperative of the prophetic poetry here described seeks to persuade, to re-

orientate, to re-integrate, in short to restore the immanence of the divine within the quotidian mundane. These prophets seek to 'transfigure the commonplace' in order to redeem, rejuvenate, and renew. Their imperatives to us become a transaction of teaching and learning to ensure that we, as listeners to their voices, might be reborn into the world with new eyes. The subtitle of this thesis is therefore 'The Didactic Imperative' of Hopkins, Thomas, Blake, whose words and images comprise a didacticism that is redemptive in its idealistic heart.

The prophetic poets here discussed represent their time whilst simultaneously attempting to change their time. What binds them across time is their prophetic vision that alters the passage of time and speaks with a transhistorical voice *sub specie aeternitatis* . They command us to work to reclaim an Edenic vision we have been heir to, yet have let fall due to the immediacy of the material which has the power to actively undermine a spiritual viewpoint. These prophetic poets are unequivocal in their striving to reclaim an Eden for us, to undo the 'double dark' of our sight and allow an unfallen reality to rise and live. They give us gifts of sight that can cure our blindness: in place of formality, limitation, and constriction, they give us imagination and quest, the inspired moment, bright lenses. They hope to enable our senses to discover the infinite in every thing.

Prophetic and poetic utterance is presented here as being one and the same: an inspired didactic act emanating from a seer who can perceive eternity in a grain of sand. These prophetic poets offer us spiritual imperatives that work outwith and against all that is rigid and confining. Their microcosmic social vision works in conjunction with a macrocosmic perspective anchored by, respectively, Scholastic, Anglican and cosmic mythological stances which serve to position these seers in relation to each other, their time, and ourselves.

Chapter One

Introduction: The Prophetic Muse

> I have made you a tester and a refiner among my people
> so that you may know and test their ways.
> They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders;
> they are bronze and iron, all of them act corruptly.
> The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire;
> in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed.
> They are called 'rejected silver,' for the LORD has rejected them.[1]

Poets and Prophets

There exists a tradition of comparing the poet and the prophet; the connection between the 'prophetic' and the 'poetic' is an ancient one, engrained in English poetry since the Renaissance and consistently present. Poets such as Blake and Shelley have openly claimed prophetic status, whilst a poet such as T S Eliot will say through Prufrock 'I am no prophet' despite the fact that his persona could be interpreted as such. Within a broadly contemporary critical arena, the idea of connection between poet and prophet has been explored by other writers and the first part of this introduction will go some way towards surveying a representative group. The second part will discuss ideas of the 'prophetic' and the 'muse', in what ways these are important concepts for this analysis, before the summary in part three prepares the way for a detailed discussion in Chapter Two of prophets and prophecy and what these mean for the poets hereinafter discussed.

Harold Fisch states that: 'We do not meet Moses in the Old Testament; we meet the words of Moses, the interposed web of textuality. It is all that we have and it is all that is given us for interpretation'[2]. This is true of all literature left behind by writers who become 'names' to us; the message transcends them as their 'afterlife'[3]. All text is founded in 'relationality': it demands that an audience actively participate in both the understanding and creation of it. The text becomes the *locus* of an encounter between speaker and reader[4]

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[1] Jeremiah 6: 27-30; cf also Malachi 3: 1-5. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotes are taken from: The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1989.

[2] Harold Fisch. Poetry With a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. p6

[3] 'A strangely durable medium, the text, which has come to signify the very assurance of an afterlife' John Guillory. Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton and Literary History. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. Preface pvii

[4] 'Reading has a transformative power. It may transform our understanding of the world and, at the same time, our understanding of ourselves, the readers … Acts of reading do not happen in a social, political, psychological, cultural or existential vacuum, nor do they occur in an ethical vacuum' Werner G. Jeanrond. Theological Hermeneutics. London:

and the reader is called into a 'covenantal discourse'[5] with the speaker which binds both across time and space, dissolving notions of singularity and division by strengthening ideas of interconnection and community; within the act of reading the individual becomes irrevocably bound-up with the solidarity of the human collective: 'In the covenant mode of discourse, world and word stand over against each other, bound together in mutual testimony'[6]. The text thus enacts an *anamnesis*, gathering to itself human experience and passing it on to be experienced anew by each recipient. This transaction with respect to the Scriptures does not relate to what lies behind the text in the form of an original meaning but rather to what lies in front of it where the interpreter stands. The Bible always addresses itself to the time of interpretation and one cannot understand it except by appropriating it anew. This means that revelation is never something over and done with, rather it is ongoing and continuous[7]. Understanding of revelation is not merely intellectual agreement with what is said, or grasping the mental state of another, it shows itself only in one's action in the world[8]. R S Thomas expresses this awareness of transaction: 'I must choose words and rhythms which will keep it fresh and have the power to recreate the experience in all its original intensity for each new reader. But in this very process the experience is changed, and will continue to be changed as each new reader apprehends it'[9].

Contemporary writers have approached the idea of connection between the 'prophetic' and the 'poetic'. Alves in his book The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet (1990) states that the goal of all heroic struggles for the creation of a just and free world is the *opening of spaces* to allow a kind of blossoming to take place (p127). More than anything, this thesis seeks to 'open spaces' within literature in order to allow explorations to take place which are unbounded by disciplinary constraints, it strives to do away with the imposed, separating boundaries of the 'literary' and the 'theological' and instead seeks to identify

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SCM Press Ltd, 1994. p111; within the act of reading and the 'horizon of expectation' we bring to the text there is 'the need for every interpreter to become as aware as possible of her or his presuppositions which may be challenged, corrected and possibly transformed during the process of reading' (*ibid* p113); cf II Timothy 3: 16: 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work'

[5] Fisch (1990) p118

[6] The Literary Guide to the Bible. Eds. Robert Alter & Frank Kermode. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997. Robert Alter 'Introduction to the Old Testament' p12 (hereinafter cited as Literary Guide)

[7] 'The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas' Roland Barthes 'From Work to Text' 1971 – cited in The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent B Leitch. New York & London: W W Norton & Co Ltd, 2001. p1473; 'The structure of the Bible as a redacted, self-interpreting text has this important exegetical consequence: the Bible effectively blocks any attempt to understand it by reconstruction of its textual history and a working back to an original, uninterpreted intention. This self-interpreting text is also self-effacing with respect to its origins. The whole orientation of Scripture is towards its future, not toward its past. The Bible is prophetic rather than expressive in its structure' Gerald L Bruns 'Midrash and Allegory: The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation' Literary Guide (1997) p627

[8] Literary Guide (1997) p629

[9] 'Words and the Poet' from R S Thomas. Selected Prose. Ed. Sandra Anstey. Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, 1983. p83

commonality. All of the poet/prophets discussed see themselves as being involved in an effort to cultivate the human 'garden': our world garden, our spiritual garden, our communal garden, and wish to help us flourish as individuals within community rather than see us stultified by lack of vision and imprisoned within an egocentrism which divides: 'Salvation is the recovery of the polyphony of life' (p128) or put another way this is 'Theology as poetic gardening' (p130).

Sir Maurice Bowra in The Prophetic Element (1959) maintains that poetry is largely concerned with revelation. Prophets have the special authority of revelation and from this comes much of their power and influence (p3), their authority is founded in vision which understands the present and passes beyond the immediate moment to its meaning and consequences (p5). Prophetic poetry seeks to shift perception from the immediate scene into the vast vistas beyond it (p7), working against the reality of catastrophe and menace and speaking to the state of the world. Prophetic revelation is the central function of poetry for writers such as Blake, Hardy, Shelley, Edith Sitwell, Yeats, Isaac Rosenberg, Robert Frost, because of their awareness of, compassion for, and compulsion to denounce the human state (p10). Using his own 'gardening' metaphor, Bowra believes that prophetic poetry is intimately concerned with humanity's desire for growth and abundance (p13), ideals that are set against man's alignment towards the horror of cruelty, oppression, war, exploitation, etc. The real task of prophetic poetry is to awaken us to the urgent significance of what is happening around us and where this might lead (p17). How this 'truth' is received, is up to us to judge. Prophetic poets are deeply concerned with what is happening now but their understanding of this is imaginative, beginning where logic and science end. What fires prophetic vision is the sense of vastly important powers at work and it is these which poets try to grasp in their real significance and to delineate in words (p19). This is surely true of Blake.

Another contemporary writer, Stephen Spender, the editor of: D H Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet (1973) has unfortunately contributed no 'Introduction' to his selection thereby leaving unexplained the matter of why - based on what exact criteria - he has designated Lawrence as a prophet. There is no mention of either 'prophet' or 'prophecy' in the Index, and no explanatory note on the nature of prophetic intent with regard to Lawrence. There is no mention of prophecy in the Notes, and I can find few meaningful references to this subject within the body of the assembled essays[10]. Similarly, A L Rowse in his biography Matthew Arnold: Poet and Prophet (1976) heralds an exploration of the

[10] See p41, p84, p162

concept of 'Arnold as Prophet' in his Introduction then fails to discuss this at all, merely mentioning Arnold's 'social criticism' without elucidation or direct reference to prophetic vocation. Again we have an undefined approach. Rowse comes round eventually to addressing the issue of Arnold as prophet in his Chapter 6, but his definition of prophecy here is a narrow one (and unrelated to poetic vocation) which focusses solely on Arnold's efforts to be 'the leading propagandist for a proper system of secondary education for the nation'[11]. Philip Henderson, in Tennyson: Poet and Prophet (1978) makes no mention of prophecy in his Contents at all, and neither prophet nor prophecy are listed in the Index. No attempt is made within the text to discuss why Tennyson should be hailed as a prophet.

Roberta Reeder in her book Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet (1994) declares that 'Akhmatova has taken her place as one of the greatest poets and prophets of the twentieth century'[12], but her book which she sees as 'a biography of a great poet' dwells little on the meaning or progression of the prophetic within Akhmatova's poetic *corpus*. Akhmatova compared herself to 'Schiller's prophetic Cassandra' believing that a facet of her soul 'adjoins the dark image of this prophetess, so great in her suffering' although she herself was 'far from greatness'[13]. Akhmatova was perceived as being one of those 'special human beings who walk on the edge of the world, not among more ordinary people', a crank, a tattered pilgrim[14]. She was attracted by the image of the prophetess, and aligned herself with this persona, her eyes 'Prophetic and fixed', her poems prayers[15], but there is little analysis of this aspect of her poetic persona in Reeder's text.

Beth Maclay Doriani in her book Emily Dickinson: Daughter of Prophecy (1996) fares much better in her quest for prophetic poetry, discussing prophecy and poetry, prophetic rhetoric, poetic inspiration, scripture, and ideas of wisdom and power. This is a more sustained and lively engagement with the concept of the poetic/prophetic and does much to support many areas of this thesis enquiry, Doriani arguing that 'Dickinson found a way to speak as an authoritative daughter of prophecy in the tradition of Joel 2: 28: 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy' (p1). Dickinson's context is discussed, her prophetic task not simply to write didactic moralisms but to provide her audience with ideals of moral excellence and spirituality. As a religious visionary she wrote to reveal the inner workings of the soul, her individuality affected like that of the biblical prophets and the romantic poets, as her religious impulse [compulsion]

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[11] A L Rowse. Matthew Arnold: Poet and Prophet. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976. p117
[12] Roberta Reeder. Anna Akhmatova: Poet and Prophet. New York: St Martin's Press, 1994. Prologue pxiii
[13] letter sent by Akhmatova possibly Feb 1907, quoted by Reeder (1994) p22
[14] Reeder (1994) p88 – and this image points the way forward to some of the concepts discussed later in this thesis
[15] cf 'Oh, it was a cold day' (1913) quoted in Reeder (1994) p98; cf also 'This was my prayer' (1913) Reeder (1994) p99; cf 'Prophecy' (1922) Reeder (1994) p159

took hold (p20). Seclusion and renunciation (p24) are seen as the source of Dickinson's power yet they cause prophetic marginalisation and displacement for someone who is compelled to speak wisdom to her culture at the cost of social nonconformity. The burden of giftedness is a situation that is both 'terrifying and lonely' (p88) in its isolation.

Dickinson's poetry of social protest attempts to influence the moral and spiritual fibre of humanity, speaking ideas that often conflict with tradition (p26). Doriani finds that her poetic voices often contradict one another, yet Dickinson's stance as an inspired visionary is one which attempts to revitalize faith because of personal experience of the divine. Her message of spiritual vitality challenges 'empty rituals and hollow religiosity' (p27). Her prophetic zeal and anger denounce social and political realities, emerge from deeply-held spiritual convictions, and are evident in the intensity of her poetry.

Dickinson's prophetic vocation revolves around the opening of spaces: 'I dwell in Possibility' – the 'possibility' of poetry which is 'A fairer House than Prose' (#657) and this brings us full circle to Alves' quote at the beginning regarding the aim of all heroic (prophetic) struggles being 'the creation of a just and free world'. In this sense Doriani presents Dickinson as exemplifying the poet/prophets who will be discussed within this thesis, who have a prophetic calling to 'make see', test and refine us the 'rejected silver' and to empower us with their poetry, to transfigure our commonplace world.

This brief survey of a representative group of writers who have made the connection between poetry and prophecy and who can be placed within a broadly contemporary critical arena, has shown that they use the term 'prophetic' in a general sense without any structured approach that would underline and support its use. Doriani's book is the exception in this regard but it does not go far enough. This analysis, in contrast to the above, seeks to connect poets to a definite and elaborated paradigm of the prophetic based upon 'first principles' sourced from the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.

Ideas of 'the prophetic'

According to the Hebrew Bible there are certain and specific 'features' which characterise a true prophet of Yahweh. The first is a personal **call** from God[16], which introduces the prophet into God's presence, known as being in the 'counsel' of the Lord[17]. As the prophet

[16] Exodus 3:1-4:17; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1: 4-19; Ezekiel 1-3; Hosea 1: 1-3; Amos 7: 14-15; Jonah 1: 1
[17] I Kings 22: 19; Jer 23: 22; Amos 3: 7

stands in God's presence[18], so he is sent to man on God's behalf[19]. Being a prophet means having ethical and social concern for the welfare of the people[20] and confronting those in power, condemning their actions when necessary. These tasks comprise symbolic acts[21] to enlighten and the use of **rhetorical** language to **persuade.** Prophets also intercede with God on behalf of the people. Prophets therefore had a 'Janus-like' function[22], representative of both God and people simultaneously[23].

Prophets were **commissioned** to communicate the word of God to the people, in order to bring about some kind of radical change. Their main function was that of **forthtelling** - being a **critic** of the present. Percy Bysshe Shelley, himself a supporter of the concept of the prophet articulates this function, linking it with poetic vocation: 'Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets; a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time'[24]. The aim of forthtelling is to change for the better by raising consciousness that can reshape the world[25]. Prophets lived and worked within a wider **context** of place and time, working within and against society's struggle with itself[26]. Largely marginalised and unheeded by society (as poets are[27]) and in their own eyes **failing** in their mission, they performed nonetheless the function of ahistorical **witness** to mankind's predicament *sub specie aeternitatis*: 'I am a seeker/in time for that which is/beyond time'[28].

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[18] I Kings 17: 1, 18:15
[19] Set apart from the rest Jeremiah 1: 5; Galatians 1: 15
[20] Deut 24: 19-22; Lev 19: 9-18
[21] Jeremiah 19; Ezekiel 4
[22] Exodus 18: 19-20
[23] God appoints Jeremiah as 'a prophet to the nations', his representative on earth (1: 5), see also 'I am now making my words in your mouth a fire' (5: 14); yet Jeremiah also represents the people, aligning himself with their sufferings before God (4: 19-21, also 8: 18-22)
[24] Percy Bysshe Shelley. A Defense of Poetry. Ed. Albert Cook. Boston, USA: Ginn & Company, 1891. p6; cf Spenser: 'A Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all' 'A Letter of the Authors' from The Faerie Queene in The Norton Anthology of English Literature. 6th edn. Vol 1. Ed. M H Abrams. New York & London: W W Norton & Company, 1993. p518
[25] 'The shaping of an imaginative world is strongly felt in the poetry of Isaiah ... He creates from nature, domestic or city life, observed in significant moments' Luis Alonso Schokel on 'Isaiah', Literary Guide (1997) p171. What Isaiah creates is examples of movement towards transfigured vision and transformation, the ideal 'objectively correlated' with the real: cf Isaiah 2: 2-5 where the imaginary reclamation of the heavenly Jerusalem on earth is extrapolated from the real geographical place.
[26] As Thomas says: 'The poet's function and privilege surely is to speak to our condition in the name of our common humanity in words which do not grow old because the heart does not grow old' 'Words and the Poet' Selected Prose (1983) p85
[27] R S Thomas testifies to marginalisation: 'And I waited there at the gateway/on the uncertain boundary between/road and field, not sure of where/I belonged' The Echoes Return Slow (1988) 'I saw the land' p29; cf 'The priest is required to make his way along glass-sown walls' The Echoes Return Slow (1988) 'There are sins rural' p46
[28] 'Abercuawg' in Frequencies (1978) from R S Thomas. Collected Poems (1945-1990). London: J M Dent, 1993. p340

Prophets possess a direct, personal awareness of God's active presence in their lives - they are **compelled** to receive and pass on[29] the word of the Lord. This endows them with **authority** to speak to the people from an intrinsic *exousia*[30] rather than an extrinsic, endowed sanction. They know a personal **cost** for the **faithfulness** their vocation engenders[31]. The 'word of God' is experienced by way of dreams[32] and visions[33] also symbols[34] which are **revelatory**: 'The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw'; 'The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh'; 'The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw'.

There is a **lineage** of prophecy, beginning with the early ecstatic prophets of the Samuel cycle involving prophetic 'guilds' or communities. This progressed to the 9th century Elijah/Elisha cycle where these emerged as distinctive individuals who existed as men of action in a charismatic 'bardic' sense. This oral tradition evolved into the classical 'writing' prophets from Amos onwards who were not members of the institutional prophetic schools. Prophetic 'guilds' or 'cultic' prophets had a professional association with the priests and the temple in pre-exilic times[35]. The canonical prophets by comparison condemn the 'cultus'[36] with its ceremony and sacrifice and exhort instead a community sensibility which goes to the heart of perspective and behaviour: 'Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean ('stain the water clear'[37]); remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow'[38], for 'what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'[39]. The canonical prophets emphasise a moral concern and a holy life as being prerequisites for adhering to God's covenant: 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings'[40]. No empty religious activity or ritual is acceptable within a deliberately sinful life. The temple itself is not iniquitous; it is more a question of the heart that is brought to the temple[41]. The prophets castigate the abuse of ritualism but

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[29] Ex 7: 1-2; 4: 15-16; Jer 1: 9; Amos 3: 8

[30] cf Mark 1: 22: 'They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'

[31] In the superscription of verse 1 of Nahum, the message is described as a *maśśā'* which means 'burden' – a burden to the recipient of the word of the Lord

[32] Jer 31: 23-26

[33] See Zechariah

[34] Jer 18; Amos 7; 8: 1-3

[35] I Sam 10: 5-6; I Sam 9: 11-13; II Kings 4: 21-25; II Kings 23: 2; Isaiah 28: 7; Jer 2: 26, 8:10, 13:13, 35:4; II Chron 29: 25-30

[36] Amos 5: 21-25; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 1: 11-15, 43: 22-24; Micah 6: 6-7; Jer 7: 21-23

[37] Blake's 'Introduction' to Songs of Innocence from William Blake. William Blake: The Complete Poems. Ed. Alicia Ostriker. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977. p104

[38] Isaiah 1: 16-17; see also lists of transgressions and sins in Amos: 2:6-8, 6: 3-7, 8: 4-6, 5: 10-14; also in Micah 2: 1ff

[39] Micah 6: 8

[40] Hosea 6: 6

[41] Amos 4:4-5 & 5: 4-5 – ritual at the national religious shrines is being maintained but going hand-in-hand with godlessness and immorality

the importance of the Temple is not rejected, it is still seen as the correct framework for religious observance and worship.

The three poets here discussed illustrate this prophetic complexity of relationship with organised religion and wider society. It can be asserted that Blake as poet/prophet performs a priestly, liturgical role, even although he sets himself against the established church. Thomas, particularly in Mass for Hard Times shows his poetry to be informed with a liturgical consciousness. For Hopkins, the centrality of liturgy and daily Mass cannot be underestimated. Yet all three poets are also concerned with prophetic ideas of 'heart', displacement and marginalisation, personal struggle with God, vocational gift and burden, task, context, vision, critique. There is a tension between their awareness of and adherence to the formal structures of 'Temple' liturgy, and their complex response of vision to a changing world as expressed through the medium of their didactic prophetic poetry. They wrestle with themselves and with others. The ancient prophets' view of behaviour was moral in relation to the theocracy which they embraced as their magnetic 'North' – it provided them with sure means of orientation and navigation. Hopkins, Thomas and Blake existed within a more ambivalent world, their sense of moral *governaunce* was not theocratic therefore their struggle to respond to moral dilemma was more complex, uncertain, and difficult.

Ideas of 'the muse'

Timothy Clark comments in The Theory of Inspiration (1997) that inspiration today has become a 'spurious and exploded theory of the sources of literary power' (p1) believing that it usually claims some kind of privileged relation between the writer's act of composition and a transcendent principle such as the Muse, Apollo, genius or the Romantic imagination. According to Clark the term 'inspiration' now has 'so little status that, though part of the ordinary language and arguably the key term in the history of western poetics, it almost never appears in guides to literary terms' (p2)[42]. Clark's understanding of the term inspiration differs to its conception and usage within the Hebrew Bible. Here it is one of the central metaphors for Yahweh's communication with his servants: 'Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah [with the

[42] 'It may be said that in ascribing the poem to a Muse, the bard simply christens (names) the problem, rather than explains it' A D Nuttall. Openings: Narrative Beginnings from the Epic to the Novel. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p220; 'But poets speak of the Muse because of the presence of rich organization in what is uttered, an organization which they know they have not managed consciously' (*ibid* p223)

implication that he will keep on sending the prophet Elijah[43]] before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse'[44]. God inspires his prophets in order that his prophets can speak to the people.

The paradigmatic prophet Moses was sent by God to teach; the lineage of prophets since Moses continued to teach, and all testified to being inspired or filled with the power of the spirit: 'But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob[45] his transgression and to Israel his sin'[46]. Joel testifies to the fact that the power of the spirit will be disseminated outwardly from God to keep on travelling within the human realm: 'Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit'[47]. The fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel occurs in Acts 2:1ff when at the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descends and new life, power and blessing endows those present with the ability to 'speak in tongues'. This benison comes 'like the rush of a violent wind' and 'divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them[48]. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability'.

This testimony to prophetic inspiration can be linked to the experience of poetic inspiration: Timothy Clark in The Theory of Inspiration (1997) calls the moment of poetic inspiration the 'space of composition', a moment that can be transgressive because it skews distinctions of inner and outer, conception and reception and is a place of unlocatable agencies and emotions that fracture seeming boundaries between self and other, act and passivity, paralysis and gift (p27). T S Eliot has also described the poet's experience of inspiration as a continual surrender of the self at that moment to something which is more valuable. He sees the progress of the artist amid the effect of inspiration as a continual self-sacrifice and extinction of personality[49]. Boris Pasternak, a major religious writer and

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[43] cf Isaiah 59: 21& 45: 23; 'Jewish Bibles regularly repeat the promise of Elijah's coming in small print following the final verse, thus ending the collection on a hopeful note and converting the anxiety of succession into a figure of eternal return or of timeless expectation' Herbert Marks on 'The Twelve Prophets' Literary Guide (1997) p232

[44] Malachi 4: 1-6

[45] One might see Blake's use of Albion as the mythical embodiment of England in similar terms to Jacob as personified Israel – both figures are archetypal and representative of nationhood

[46] Micah 3: 8

[47] Joel 2: 28-29

[48] cf Euripides' The Bacchae when the women are inspired and are at the height of their religious enthusiasm: 'they carried/Fire on their heads, and yet their soft hair was not burnt' Euripides. The Bacchae and Other Plays. Tr. Philip Vellacott. 2nd edn. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973. (752ff) p218

[49] 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in Thomas Stearns Eliot. Selected Essays. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1934. p17

poet but not an orthodox Christian has left us a description of inspiration from the 'inside' of the writing process, through the voice of Yury in Doctor Zhivago, and it is useful to quote this in full here:

> After two or three stanzas and several images by which he was himself astonished, his work took possession of him and he experienced the approach of what is called inspiration. As such moments the correlation of the forces controlling the artist is, as it were, stood on its head. The ascendancy is no longer with the artist or the state of mind which he is trying to express, but with language, his instrument of expression. Language, the home and dwelling of beauty and meaning, itself begins to think and speak for man and turns wholly into music, not in the sense of outward, audible sounds but by virtue of the power and momentum of its inward flow. Then, like the current of a mighty river polishing stones and turning wheels by its very movement, the flow of speech creates in passing, by the force of its own laws, rhyme and rhythm and countless other forms and formations, still more important and until now undiscovered, unconsidered and unnamed. At such moments Yury felt that the main part of his work was not being done by him but by something which was above him and controlling him: the thought and poetry of the world as it was at that moment and as it would be in the future. He was controlled by the next step it was to take in the order of its historical development; and he felt himself to be only the pretext and the pivot setting it in motion[50]

Pasternak (or Yury) are both controlled by language itself, utterance from 'outwith' the self, the place of unlocatable agency which seems to have its own life in time and there is a sense here of a lineage of language which parallels the lineage of prophecy.

There are various passages in the Hebrew Bible which relate prophetic inspiration to the activity of the Spirit[51]. Inspired by word, dream, vision or symbol, the prophets are inspired to speak the message of God to man[52]. This makes each prophet a channel, medium, spokesperson, mouthpiece, representative[53]of Yahweh. Each inspired 'message' or oracle is uniquely cast in the mould of the man but this raises a question about the final authenticity of the word of God if it is sullied through human contact: 'if God inspires St Paul to speak, how are we to strain out St Paul, so as to be left with the pure word of God?'[54]. The analogy might be: like clear water going through a pipe which absorbs as it travels some colour, residue, character, flavour, of the pipe itself so that it emerges

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[50] Boris Pasternak. Doctor Zhivago. London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1958. pp391-2

[51] For activity of the Spirit see: I Sam 10: 6, 10; I Sam 19: 20, 23; these relate to ideas of possessed 'prophetic ecstasy' in: I Kings 22: 24; Joel 2: 28-9; Hosea 9: 7; Nehemiah 9: 30; Zech 7: 12 showing that prophecy is inspired by the Spirit of God. Micah 3: 8; I Chron 12: 18; II Chron 15: 1, 20: 14, 24: 20; Nehemiah 9: 20; Ezekiel 11: 5 give examples of the Spirit's inspiration of the prophetic word.

[52] The word 'Malachi' in the superscription of the same book translates as 'my messenger'; cf also the beginning of chapter 3: 'I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me ... The messenger of the covenant'; cf 'Where is the God of justice? See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple' (Malachi 2: 17-3: 1). Where is the God of Judgement? – he is in the messenger.

[53] Ezekiel 36: 23: '... the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes'

[54] Austin Farrer. Interpretation and Belief. Ed. Charles C Conti. London: SPCK, 1976. p10

changed by and to some extent merged with that which it has travelled through, so the given oracle emerging from the mouth of the man takes on a definite cast of that man, in order, importantly, to make the message relevant to the ears of his own kind.

Each prophet's individuality, character, and experience merge with the words of the Lord to provide a unique and idiosyncratic utterance that reflects the man whilst not diminishing the divine[55]. The words remain 'the word of God', but through the necessity of being spoken by a man to men they come into the human domain. Yet the prophet remains an outsider among men; he may be the corporate voice of the people as well as the spokesman of God but holds marginalised and unrecognised status. The prophet's experience of 'edge' status comprises both sanctification and transformation; the 'wilderness' displaces then reintegrates the changed prophet in order to perform his sacred tasks[56]. Without the prophet as medium, God's message would not reach mankind. Without inspiration from 'the other' as source, the divine message would not reach the prophet.

The word 'inspiration'[57] is a noun formed from the Latin and English translations of '*theopneustos*' in II Timothy 3: 16: 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work'[58]. *Theopneustos* however means 'out-breathed' rather than 'in-breathed' by God, divinely expired. The 'breath' or 'spirit' of God in the Hebrew Bible (*rûah, n^{e}sāmâ*)[59] denotes the active

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[55] Lowth comments: 'The Divine Spirit by no means takes such an entire possession of the mind of the prophet as to subdue or extinguish the character and genius of the man; the natural powers of the mind are in general elevated and refined; they are neither eradicated nor totally obscured; and though the writings of Moses, of David, and of Isaiah, always bear the marks of a divine and celestial impulse, we may, nevertheless, plainly discover in them the particular characters of their respective authors' Robert Lowth. Lectures on The Sacred Poetry of The Hebrews. London: S Chadwick & Co, 1847. p174

[56] 'In the Elijah versions the Wilderness is consistently presented as a reservoir of divine power to which the prophet withdraws when in need of spiritual sustenance' Literary Guide (1997) p588

[57] 'The experience of poetic inspiration is said to differ from normal ideation in possessing some or all of these four characteristics: (a) The composition is sudden, effortless, and unanticipated. The poem or passage springs to completion all at once, without the prior intention of the poet, and without that process of considering, rejecting, and selecting alternatives which ordinarily intervenes between the intention and the achievement. (b) The composition is involuntary and automatic; it comes and goes at its own pleasure, independently of the will of the poet. (c) In the course of composition, the poet feels intense excitement, usually described as a state of elation and rapture, but occasionally said to be racking and painful in its initial stages, though followed by a sense of blissful relief and quiescence. (d) The completed work is as unfamiliar and surprising to the poet as though it had been written by someone else' M H Abrams. The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953. p189

[58] Hopkins comments in a letter to Bridges: CXXXVI Oct 13, 1886 from Univ Coll, Stephen's Green, Dublin: 'I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works. What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards ... To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known widely known, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good' Claude Colleer Abbott. Ed. The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges. London: Oxford University Press, 1935. p231

[59] 'In biblical Hebrew, the words *wind, spirit* and *breath* are identical (*ruach*), denoting the mysterious life-giving force which in nature blew over the face of the waters at the Creation, and in man inspire prophetic vision. In Shelley's *Ode,* the wind performs precisely this dual function, symbolizing on the one hand the resurrective forces of nature quickening a new birth out of the dead matter of the universe, and on the other hand, the Spirit of Prophecy awakening in the poet the apocalyptic vision of a messianic springtime for mankind: 'Be thou, Spirit fierce,/My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

outgoing of divine power[60] to various ends: creation[61], revelation to and through prophets[62], redemption[63], and judgement. This latter is exemplified by: 'his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck – to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads them astray'[64]. The breath of inspiration is also likened to fire, a destructive element: 'For his burning place has long been prepared; truly it is made ready for the king, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it'[65]. The word 'inspiration' denotes the divine origin of power and ability, and inspiration is transmitted to other receivers through the medium of the end-product, *graphē*, the written text that is 'God-breathed': 'this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today'. Inspiration has a double authorship[66] with man as secondary agent, God the Holy Spirit as primary: 'because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God'[67].

The poet Milton attests to the experience of being inspired, and equates this to a benison of Grace from the Holy Spirit: 'Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;/And shall Grace not find means, that finds her way,/The speediest of thy winged messengers,/To visit all thy creatures, and to all/Comes unprevented, unimplored, unsought,/Happy for man, so coming; he her aid/Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;/Atonement for himself or offering meet'[68]. Furthermore, Milton enhances and underlines his stance here (which equates the Holy Spirit with his experience of inspiration) with Book IX lines 20-24 where he describes his experience of inspiration in terms of both surrender and 'negative capability': 'If answerable style I can obtain/Of my celestial patroness, who deigns/Her

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.../Be through my lips to unwakened earth/The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,/If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'' Murray Roston. Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1965. p194-5

[60] Job 34: 14-15: 'If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust'

[61] 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' Psalm 33: 6; 'The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life' Job 33: 4; cf Genesis 1: 2: 'the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters' & 2:7: 'then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being'

[62] Isaiah 48: 16: 'And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit'; 61: 1: 'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me'; Micah 3: 8: 'I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord'; Joel 2: 28: 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh'

[63] Ezekiel 36: 25-28

[64] Isaiah 30: 28

[65] Isaiah 30: 33

[66] Bede says of the poet Caedmon: 'He did not acquire the art of poetry from men or through any human teacher but received it as a free gift from God' Bede. A History of the English Church and People. Tr. Leo Sherley-Price. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968. p251

[67] II Peter 1: 19-21

[68] John Milton. Paradise Lost. Ed. Alastair Fowler. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1971. III 227-234 p156

nightly visitation unimplored,/And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires/Easy my unpremeditated verse'. Compare also Milton's description of the darkness and obscurity of his blindness from which inspiration's song emerges like a wakeful bird singing[69]. These descriptions of inspiration (words like 'visitation', 'unimplored', 'dictates', and 'unpremeditated') put Milton into the same territory as Hopkins[70], Thomas, and Blake, who also attest to similar experiences of being inspired. Plato too, speaks about a similar mediation of spirit that is effectively inspiration: 'spirits ... are half-way between God and man, they are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth ... descending with the heavenly answers and commandments, and since they are between the two estates they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole. They form the medium of the prophetic arts ... and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have any intercourse whether waking or sleeping, with the gods'[71]. This view of the spiritual intercourse between God and man, earth and heaven, by way of inspiration given and received is also expressed by Shakespeare:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact ...
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name[72]

Shakespeare gestures behind him towards classical precedent as well as pointing forward towards Milton's appropriation of the classical and Christian Muses. 'The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/Are of imagination all compact' echoes Plato: 'when he that loves beauty is touched by such madness he is called a lover. Such a one, as soon as he beholds the beauty of this world, is reminded of true beauty, and his wings begin to grow; then is he fain to lift his wings and fly upward; yet he has not the power, but inasmuch as he gazed upward like a bird, and cares nothing for the world beneath, men charge it upon him that

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[69] Paradise Lost (1971) III 37-40 p145

[70] Hopkins comments in a letter to Bridges: CXXX Sept 1, 1885 fromUniv Coll, Stephen's Green, Dublin: 'I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will' Abbott (1935) p221

[71] Plato. The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Eds. Edith Hamilton, Huntington Cairns. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961. 'Symposium' 202e p555

[72] A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5 Sc 1 lines 4-17 William Shakespeare. The Complete Oxford Shakespeare. Vol II: Comedies. Eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. London: Oxford University Press, 1987. p595; cf Lowth: 'The parabolic may, indeed, be accounted a peculiar style, in which things moral, political, and divine, are marked and represented by comparisons, implied or expressed, and adopted from sensible objects' Lowth (1847) p71; from a poetic point of view they might be seen as Eliot's 'objective correlatives' - the spiritual represented by the actual

he is demented'[73]. The concept of Shakespeare's ecstatic bard: 'The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling' is eloquently expressed by Gray: 'Robed in the sable garb of woe,/With haggard eyes the poet stood; /(Loose his beard and hoary hair /Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)/And, with a Master's hand and Prophet's fire,/Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre'[74] and also finds classical precedent in The Bacchae of Euripides and Catullus' 'The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis'[75]. These portrayals show the surrender of self to something that has greater power and control, and behind such a surrender is the insight that man is not the sum total of all things. The ecstatic and bardic modes of articulation relate directly to the prophetic concept of compulsion, and Virgil provides classical precedent: 'The Seer, yielding at last/To strong compulsion, rolled his eyes ablaze/With sea-green light, and grumbling angrily/Unsealed his lips to utter Fate's decrees'[76]. The portrayal of the 'ecstatic' prophets or prophetic 'guilds' in I Samuel 10: 5-11 resonates in this context: 'there, as you come to the town, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the shrine with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre playing in front of them; they will be in a prophetic frenzy'. Blake picks up on these images and appropriates them for his own use, visually in Plate 15 of Milton and elsewhere.

Socrates in his dialogue with Ion comments on inspiration: 'this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine'[77] and he speaks of the ecstatic 'divine' heights reached by a poet when he is compelled: poets have their excellence not from art, but are 'inspired, possessed' and are 'not in their senses' when they write but are 'seized with Bacchic transport'[78]. Ecstatic and bardic utterances comprise elevated oracular pronouncements involving highly-wrought rhetoric. Plato is a proponent of this concept: 'if any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to nought by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found'[79]. He states unequivocally that: 'no man, when in his wits, attains prophetic truth and inspiration'[80] because he believes that 'a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him'[81].

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[73] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Phaedrus' 249d-e p496
[74] Thomas Gray's Pindaric ode 'The Bard' lines 17-22
[75] 'The Tableau Bacchanal' Poem LXIV Catullus. Catullus. Ed. G P Goold. 2nd Ed. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1983. p155
[76] Virgil. The Georgics. Tr. L P Wilkinson. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1982. Georgics IV 451 p139
[77] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Ion' 533d p219
[78] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Ion' 534 p220
[79] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Phaedrus' 245 p492
[80] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Timaeus' 71e p1194
[81] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Ion' 534b p220

The concept of inspiration, of 'inbreathing' reaches back to Hesiod who links it with the concept of the Muses: 'So said mighty Zeus' daughters, the sure of utterance, and they gave me a branch of springing bay to pluck for a staff, a handsome one, and they breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforetime. And they told me to sing of the family of blessed ones who are for ever, and first and last always to sing of themselves'[82]. The pastoral idyll where Hesiod's poet is inspired is picked up by Blake in his 'Introduction' to the Songs of Innocence where the inspired 'piper' sings his songs of celebration: 'Pipe a song about a Lamb;/So I piped with merry chear ...Sing thy songs of happy chear,/So I sung the same again'.

Shakespeare conceives of the poet's eye as being one which can 'body forth' things both heavenly and earthly, because the poetic faculty partakes of both realms. This also finds classical precedent in The Odyssey where Phemius the bard pleads with Odysseus saying he is 'a bard, singing for Gods and men alike. I am self-taught; the god has implanted in my breast all manner of ways of song, and I am worthy to sing before you just as before a god'[83] and in the court of King Alcinous: 'summon also the sacred bard Demodocus, because on him more than on any other the god has bestowed the gift of song, to delight men on whatever theme he may be inspired to sing'[84]. Ovid too attested to divinely-inspired utterance: 'Informed with God, with angels we discourse,/In springs divine our instinct hath its source'[85] and again more succinctly showing the heavenly/earthly connection: 'There is a god within us. It is when he stirs us that our bosom warms; it is his impulse that sows the seeds of inspiration. I have a peculiar right to see the faces of the gods, whether because I am a bard (*vel quia sum vates*) or because I sing of sacred things'[86].

The 'Heavenly Muse' which Milton invokes in Paradise Lost (Urania, originally the Muse of Astronomy) is claimed by Lily Campbell in a notable early discussion of 'The Christian Muse'[87] to be the divine inspiration which revealed the truths of religion to Moses and is also the spirit of God which dwells in the heart of every believer. It is Milton in Paradise Lost who provides us with a conflation of the Muse and the inspiration of the Christian Holy Spirit. The invocations identify the Heavenly Muse as the inspirer of the biblical writers and combine the Muse with the Holy Ghost[88] and with the expiry of God's creative

[82] Hesiod. Theogony & Works and Days. Tr. M L West. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. 'Theogony' 29-35
[83] Homer. The Odyssey. Tr. Walter Shewring. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. XXII p273
[84] The Odyssey (1980) VIII 45-131 p85
[85] Ovid. Ars Amatoria. Tr. B P Moore. London & Glasgow: Blackie & Son Ltd, 1935. III 549-50 p151
[86] Ovid. Fasti. Tr. Sir J G Frazer. London & New York: William Heinemann Ltd, 1931. VI 5-8 p319
[87] Lily B Campbell. 'The Christian Muse'. The Huntington Library Bulletin. HLB 8 (October 1935) 29-70
[88] Campbell HLB 8 p68

breath: 'Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top/Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire/That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,/In the beginning how the heavens and earth/Rose out of chaos' (Book I 6-13). Milton invokes divine aid in the form of inspiration to help him create: 'thou O Spirit, that dost prefer/Before all temples the upright heart and pure,/Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first/Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread/Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss/And madest it pregnant' (Book I 17-22) and he testifies to being inspired by the Holy Spirit: 'I sung of Chaos and eternal Night,/Taught by the heavenly Muse' (Book III 18-32). Milton asserts that the Muse is Christian: 'Descend from heaven Urania ... for thou/Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top/Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heavenly born' (Book VII 1-12) – moving divine inspiration away from the classical world and relocating it as a Christian Holy Spirit.

This invocation to Book VII expresses the contraries of Sion and Olympus, the dove and Pegasus, the Christian Muse and the pagan Muses, but Milton uses Urania as a symbol of divine inspiration itself: 'The meaning, not the name I call', emphasising that she is 'heavenly born'. This idea of the 'heavenly born' has precedent in Pindar - in his 5th Nemean Ode (line 25) he tells of a song sung long ago by the Muses describing them as *Dios archomenai* – 'beginning of-Zeus' – to show that they too are 'heavenly born'[89]. Similarly, Apollonius Rhodius in his Argonautica: 'Beginning from Thee (*archomenos seo)* Phoebus Apollo, I will recount the glorious deeds of those born long ago'[90]. Demodocus in The Odyssey[91] expresses the same point of origination: *hormētheis theou archeto* literally: 'having been stirred/made to rise of-the-God he began'.

In his invocation to Urania the Christian Muse[92], Milton addresses the real presence behind her fact and the place where she originates: 'In presence of the almighty Father'. Milton is attempting to transcend pagan forms of thought and shift his narrative into the Christian realm, envisaging Urania as a celestial being rather than a classical deity. In Paradise Regained Milton is more specific about the origins, effects and intentions of divine inspiration, his 'Christian Muse', effectively moving the phenomenon into prophetic territory making it a 'Prophetic Muse':

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[89] Nuttall (1992) p11
[90] Nuttall (1992) p10
[91] The Odyssey (1980) VIII 499: 'The bard felt the prompting of the god and began' p96
[92] The Christian Muse as addressee for invocation was introduced to the world of divine poetry in La Muse Chrétienne published in 1574 by Saluste du Bartas (Campbell HLB 8 p37); it elevated Uranic from the muse of astronomy into the place she held henceforth as the muse of Christian poetry (Campbell HLB 8 p39).

Sion's songs, to all true tasts excelling,
Where God is prais'd aright, and Godlike men,
The Holiest of Holies, and his Saints;
Such are from God inspir'd

... to our Prophets far beneath
As men divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of Civil Government
In thir majestic unaffected stile

In them is plainest taught, and easiest learnt,
What makes a Nation happy, and keeps it so,
What ruins Kingdoms, and lays Cities flat[93]

Campbell asserts that the acceptance of Urania as the muse of Christian poetry was so well established by Milton's time that he was bound by tradition to invoke her aid when he wrote the Christian story[94]. Thus we have the effect of the classical Muse being superceded by the Christian Muse entering into the world of inspired poetry as a Prophetic Muse, the poet glancing 'from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven' and telling forth, or 'bodying forth' things unseen and unknown (which the poet sees and knows) to give them a local habitation and a name for our benefit: for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness - didactic acts.

The prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible are didactic in that they concern themselves with the teaching of behaviour and ethical choice; the prophet's function is to expose the moral life of man and realign it with an eternal and absolute spiritual value. Didactic poetry questions us by providing us with a vision of ourselves and our behaviour to which we can react. It re-presents the world to our sight in order that we can refresh a perception that has become blunted and jaded due to over-familiarisation[95]. The function of didactic poetry is to cause change and this concept of a moral didacticism finds its classical roots in Hesiod's Works and Days which gives advice for living a life of honesty industry[96]. In this way the poet is a provider of wisdom through didactic imperatives to the reader, as Plato comments: 'But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh[97] – and they are not unknown, Socrates – conceive and bear the things of the spirit. And what are they?

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[93] John Milton. Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica. Ed. Gordon Campbell. London: J M Dent, 1993. Paradise Regained IV 331-364 pp496-7

[94] Campbell HLB 8 p67

[95] cf Coleridge's account of Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads: 'Mr Wordsworth ... was to propose to himself as his object, to give the *charm of novelty* to things of every day, and to *excite a feeling* analogous to the supernatural, by *awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom*, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which *in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude* we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand' [my emphasis] Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Biographia Literaria. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 7. Eds. James Engell & W Jackson Bate. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983. Vol II Ch 14 p7; cf Jeremiah 5: 21: 'Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not'

[96] Theogony & Works and Days (1988) pxiii

[97] cf John 3: 6: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'

you ask. Wisdom and all her sister virtues; it is the office of every poet to beget them, and of every artist whom we call creative'[98]. Horace agrees that 'moral sense is the fountain and source of proper writing'[99]. Plato exhorts that 'whole poets must be learned by heart' because familiarity with literature and extensive learning help to make a good and wise man[100]. Aristotle takes this further and adds the issue of *telling forth*: 'it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, ie that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity' and this highlights the difference between the historian and the poet: the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen. For this reason he perceives poetry as a more philosophical and serious thing than history because it speaks of universals[101], history of particulars[102].

This insight into didactic poetics provides us with a bridge to Hebrew Bible prophecy which tells forth what is likely to come to pass if a present lack of moral imperative continues. Perception however remains the key to change and realignment. The poet D H Lawrence believed that: 'Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges,/Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending'[103] and this is an expression of Blake's concept of 'fourfold vision', the 'whole' man - physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual - being brought to bear in the act of seeing which renders him insighted, rather than foiled (deluded) by mere surface appearance.

Summary

The first part of this introduction surveyed a small representative group of writers who within a broadly contemporary critical arena have addressed the idea of connection between poetry and prophecy. The second part discussed ideas of the 'prophetic' and the 'muse', exploring concepts which have relevance for this thesis. Chapter Two will now seek to connect poets to a definite and elaborated paradigm of the prophetic based upon 'first principles' sourced from the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible. It will analyse in detail what in Hebrew Bible terms the word 'prophecy' means and will prepare the way for these criteria to be used as an imposable structure applied to poetic vocation in order to show the ways in which poets might fit the prophetic 'mould' with their 'poetry of social

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[98] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Symposium' 208e-209 p560
[99] Horace and Persius. Satires and Epistles. Tr. Niall Rudd. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979. 'Ars Poetica' 309 p198
[100] Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Laws' VII 811 p1381
[101] 'The Bible saw in every event its eternal and universal meaning, but it was through the personal vision, suffering, and faith of individual men that this universal meaning was expressed' Roston (1965) p94
[102] Aristotle. Poetics I. Tr. Richard Janko. Indianapolis, Indiana, USA: Hackett Publishing Co Inc, 1987. 3.2.3 51b1 p12
[103] from the poem 'Thought' in Last Poems by D H Lawrence: Selected Poems. Ed. Mara Kalnins. London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1992. p226

protest'[104]. Such an analysis will endow poetry with 'prophetic intent', for as Percy Bysshe Shelley observed: 'The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry'[105].

This investigation does not seek to ensure that the poets discussed are seen in an identical light. Synthesis will be striven for in terms of the prophetic criteria proposed, but there are differences between these poet/prophets not only in terms of character, message, experience of context etc, but also relating to theological positioning. These will be highlighted in the Conclusion.

[104] Stanley Gardner. Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraced. London: The Athlone Press, 1986. p106
[105] Defense (1891) p46

Chapter Two

The Hebrew Bible: On Prophets and Prophecy

> Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth;
> and the LORD said to me,
> 'Now I have put my words in your mouth.
> See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
> to pluck up and to pull down,
> to destroy and to overthrow,
> to build and to plant.'[1]

Introduction

The Hebrew Bible is a complex product of a complex people. The culture that fostered this collection of disparate texts was the Ancient Near East, timescale that of two and three thousand years ago. These scriptures testify to the experience of human communities living within and responding to the external politics and circumstances of their day, also to their changing and ambivalent attitudes to their historical (and traditional) idea of their living God (Yahweh). History for them was the arena of Yahweh's activity and the ongoing expression of his relationship (covenant) with his people. Their canonical texts are rooted in the contexts of the Judaic Theism which created them. The Hebrew God Yahweh, as a voice 'construct' within the text; as a 'literary' personality and a character, is presented as both a God of disclosure[2] and a God of hiddenness[3]. He not only views the Hebrew peoples in particular as his 'elect' but also presents himself as the creator of the universe, the world and its history, which he 'knows' from its beginning to its end[4]. He is an eschatological deity eternally viewing his purposes in the present, in light of their end. Yahweh discloses himself and his purposes within the context of human life as it is. He is presented as promising no 'quick fixes' but rather, through his prophets, he emphasises the importance of human choice and responsibility, of correct behaviour towards our fellow man, comprising a *modus operandi* that is both altruistic and compassionate and in his eyes means effectively, 'walking with God'.

Religion as it was traditionally understood meant for the people the 'cultus', the official sanctuaries presided over by divinely-ordained priests and prophets who officiated during the annual cycle of religious festivals and general worship. Their rites and ceremonies on

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[1] Jeremiah 1: 9-10
[2] 'I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness' (Isa 45:19).
[3] 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour' (Isa 45:15).
[4] 'For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other' (Isa 45:18).

behalf of the populace and the king were trusted to be entirely effective, and their authority was founded upon historical precedent with access to inherited law.

The radical and often charismatic prophets who began to emerge in opposition to the official cultus preached nothing of peace, complacency or good news. They had neither official status in the eyes of the law nor the religious institutions, and attempted to undermine what they saw as the 'empty' religious rites practised by the cult in favour of a direct and immediate contact with Yahweh which was determined by correct choices and behaviour. Yahweh did not want hypocrisy, he wanted justice. Their messages preached neither comfort nor security, nothing in the world was reliable except the purposes and words of Yahweh, and the prophets' own authority for their deeds and acts rested solely on their testimony of his call and commissioning along with their ongoing inspiration from him in the form of both visions and words. Their method of communication was by proclamation rather than prediction, and by *telling forth* as opposed to foretelling or divination[5].

The prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible comprise the three large books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the twelve small tracts from Hosea to Malachi. Today the word 'prophecy' is taken to mean 'prediction of the future'; however the Greek word *prophetes* meant: 'one who speaks on behalf of someone else', and in the case of the Hebrew Bible prophets, that was Yahweh. Yahweh for the Hebrews was a 'non-negotiable' entity, pervasive and omnipotent, immanent and transcendent. Some, in our contemporary world, view God as a questionable commodity, dispensable and unreal. In this way, contemporary culture can be deemed as secular. Religious viewpoint depends upon the prevailing norms of a society in a given time, and many contemporary readers may view (with the scepticism of the age) the Hebrew texts as implausible and flawed for the very reason that they acknowledge Yahweh as the 'given' which underpins all utterance. To suspend disbelief however and interpret the texts with their superscription of God intact, does allow a wider and deeper understanding of 'meaning' than more circumscribed viewpoints would normally admit. There will always remain cultural dissonance between

[5] These reflect Hebraic ideas of time and verbal tense: 'There is great peculiarity in the Hebrew language. For the Hebrew verbs have no form for expressing the imperfect or indefinite of the present tense, or an action which now is performing: this is usually effected by a participle only, or by a verb substantive understood, neither of which are often made use of ... They take another method of attaining this end, and for the sake of clearness and precision, express future events by the past tense, or rather by the perfect present, as if they had actually taken place; and, on the contrary, past events by the future, as if immediately or speedily to happen, and only proceeding towards their completion' Lowth (1847) p167 – this makes future prediction (foretelling or divining) and exposition of the present and past (forthtelling) difficult to distinguish for all tenses are indeterminate and open to interpretation: see for example Isaiah 10: 28-32: the journey of Sennacherib towards Jerusalem is a prediction but is presented as an historical narration, a past event (*ibid* p168); cf also Joel 1: 6, 7, 10 – a plague of locusts is described as if it had already happened, yet the prophet is speaking of a future event.

contemporary life and the ancient Hebrew world; disobedience of the people before Yahweh then does not mean the same thing as moral 'disobedience' today – if in fact such a thing exists. Contemporary life and action are considered within diverse fora and use different criteria for judgement. The notion of 'divine inspiration' by which the prophets claim to have spoken is, in our post-Freudian world treated with derision, the idea of the 'unconscious' taking the place of Yahweh as the experience of the 'other'.

This leaves modern non-believers with a prime difficulty in respect to exegesis of biblical texts: they are forced to suspend their disbelief if they are to engage with them in any meaningful way, which goes against the grain of a contemporary (non-theocratic) culture. There are however, many who continue to believe in the existence of a theocratic deity. This thesis will access the texts discussed by treating as 'truthful' the testimony presented and the messages imparted, in order that the exact nature of prophecy can be established.

Vocation/individuality

The prophets are described through an exposition of their respective vocations; there is little biographical information given and no attempt made to describe more rounded personalities with lives before and after prophecy. The prophets existed as representatives of belief: as holders of an office before Yahweh and their testimonies delineate a vocation which subsumes the individual personality into the task. Hiddenness of self in and for vocation means a calling to allow the self to be used as paradigm for the insight of others - the self as lens which refracts ideas, beliefs, truths, actions.

The texts concentrate on how the prophet acted with respect to his calling and the authority of his commission, rather than who in reality that prophet, *qua* man, was. The change comes with Jeremiah and Isaiah where the individual man is emphasised through the experience of the pain and suffering he endures in carrying out the tasks Yahweh demands[6]. The burden of these is explored within a personal testimony of suffering which each man must bear[7] if he is to continue being the 'mouth' of Yahweh. Suffering becomes an intrinsic part of the prophet's service and is indivisible from the compulsion involved in carrying out Yahweh's instructions. The concept of the prophet is widened with the testimony of Jeremiah and the paradigmatic 'Servant Songs' within Isaiah[8] - the whole individual, with feelings, fears and persecution to deal with, brought to bear within the wider prophetic task.

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[6] Jeremiah is characterised by his *agon* which exemplifies the value of struggle in and for itself even if failure is anticipated.
[7] See also Yahweh's burden, he has 'borne' Israel to birth and must 'bear' the weight of the people's sin: Isa 46:3-4.
[8] See p49 below

Jeremiah complains to Yahweh about his vocation and its cost: 'Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable' and he accuses Yahweh of having betrayed him: 'Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail'. Such complaints however will not be tolerated: 'If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth' (15: 18-19). Jeremiah is not to complain of the gift of vocation, vision, understanding, being the mouth of the Lord, in spite of the personal anguish he experiences as he sees and feels through God's eyes and heart. He cannot bear the waywardness of the people, the chaos of life and the apparent failure of mission. God's only answer is to say that Jeremiah must speak worthily in order to continue to be worthy of the honour bestowed, that he must take on the burden of suffering if he is to continue receiving the gift of the Lord.

There is a difference between prophets who held hereditary office within the cultus, whose vocations did not give rise to texts left behind, and the charismatic individualism of prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel whose orally transmitted wisdom, no doubt delivered to the people in an energetic, bardic manner, was gathered and recorded, giving rise to the texts we receive from the Bible today. In similar fashion, charismatic poets such as Dylan Thomas and W B Yeats, or the zealot William Blake, have also left behind texts as products which we have inherited, and it is these texts both ancient and modern that testify to conjoined prophetic/poetic vocations, as records of voice. Very often the charismatic prophets were loud in their condemnation of the cultic prophets, who preached easy complacency and who supported the formal religious structures of their day, promoting (according to the non-affiliated prophets) empty observances and rituals at the expense of the correct moral choices which drive behaviour. The different forms of utterance of the two sides reflected their respective stances, the cultic prophets regulating their utterance by way of convention and standardisation, whereas the independent prophets accessed a wide variety of language forms which were used within the spread of society as a whole[9].

Call/commissioning and reaction of inadequacy - understanding of opposition

The prophetic call meant that the independent prophets (as laymen) were required to abandon the regulated orders and ideals of their society's formal religious structures and strike-out on their own in opposition. This was a dangerous and lonely stance to take and the call reflects this in that it requires the individual to leave his life, all he knows[10], to become a 'mouth', the servant of a higher power which directly endangers that individual's

[9] The prophets as paradigms embodied the conscience of the people as well as Yahweh's demands, they are not portrayed as individuals, rather as 'types' performing function and vocation within Yahweh's mission.

[10] See Amos 7:14-15 where Yahweh plucks him from his normal life and says: 'Go, prophesy'; cf Moses: Ex 3:1-6. Cf also similar call (to Kingship) for David: II Sam 7:8-9.

health and life. This element of compulsion within call is something which the prophet cannot fight[11]. The call is unequivocal in its request that the whole man be subsumed within vocation and yet is detrimental to the prophet's task, in that his authority emanates from call and ongoing 'voice' contact with Yahweh, but remains unsanctioned by wider society. The prophet is continually required to justify his authority based on these phenomena which are of necessity personal and singular unverifiable experiences[12].

The 'gift' and concomitant 'burden[13]' of call and commissioning have the effect of weighing-down the individual with knowledge and responsibility beyond the experience of others and placing him in complete isolation before God. The gift of vision and understanding is a double-edged sword, distancing the prophet from the very people he is supposed to represent before God and to whom he must speak God's words[14]. He stands completely alone before the people and before God[15].

The call comes in different ways to each individual[16] but most feel themselves to be inadequate[17] to the task, and protest the vocation gifted them. Isaiah's call[18] comes with a feeling of the weight of his own sin and mortality in the world[19]: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'[20]. Not only self-knowledge but also the weight and oppression of knowledge of the people's sin comes with call and commissioning. Jeremiah too feels inadequate to the task: 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy'[21], echoing Moses' protestation: 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue' (Ex 4:10)[22]. Many of the prophets receive their call through a direct and personal address from Yahweh and a dialogue ensues whereby their

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[11] Ezekiel testifies: 'I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me' (3:14).
[12] Intimate contact with Yahweh gave the prophets their authority and strength. Micah attests: 'But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin' Mic 3:8.
[13] See Num 11:17; cf 11:14 for idea of 'burden' with respect to Moses.
[14] cf Paradise Lost (1971) I 22-26 for an analogue to this: 'what in me is dark/Illumine, what is low raise and support;/That to the highth of this great argument/I may assert eternal providence,/And justify the ways of God to men'.
[15] Accounts of call and vision: Amos 7-9; Isa 6; Jer 1; Ezek 1-3; Zech 1:7-6:8; I Kings 19:19f (Elisha); I Sam 3:1ff (Samuel); Ex 3-4, 4:12 (Moses); I Kings 22:19-22 (Micaiah ben Imlah). See also the call of Gideon: Judg 6:11-24.
[16] See Isa 6; Ezek 1; I Kings 22:19ff; Zech 1:7ff; Job 1; Isa 40:6-11; Isa 61:1-3.
[17] For other testimony of inadequacy, cf: Ex 4:10; Jer 1:6; Ex 6:12; Judg 6:15.
[18] Isa 6: 1
[19] cf Wordsworth: 'The world is too much with us; late and soon,/Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:/Little we see in Nature that is ours' – the weight of sensibility involving knowledge and experience is a weary burden. 'The World Is Too Much with Us' quoted from Romantic Poetry and Prose. Eds. Harold Bloom, Lionel Trilling. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. p174
[20] Isa 6: 5
[21] Jer 1: 6
[22] cf Ex 6:12; see also Judg 6:14-15.

protestations are answered and silenced, the commission often being summed-up with the verbs 'send' or 'go'[23].

Jeremiah's call shows that he was already chosen even before he was born (Jer 1:5)[24] - known, consecrated, and appointed as a prophet to the nations[25] by Yahweh who puts his words into Jeremiah's mouth (1:9)[26]. The prophets are chosen by Yahweh on the basis of his own criteria even when on the surface they appear to be unsuitable for the task. Furthermore just as it is part of the prophetic task to re-establish Yahweh's covenant with the people, so the Lord establishes a 'covenant' with his prophets, for without his help his demands on his servants would appear impossible[27].

Compulsion

The element of compulsion is a component part of prophetic vocation. Jeremiah testifies to being overpowered: 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot' (20:7-9)[28]. There is an element of subjugation involved in being the mouth of Yahweh and this curtails personal freedom, the prophets becoming channels or media for the Lord's word, precluding any retention of self-determination[29]. However there is also an element of free choice involved in choosing to accept the dubious privilege of being the servant of the Lord[30]. This is martyrdom – the freedom to choose suffering - and such a choice was made and made again in the face of opposition, persecution and failure[31]. All of the prophets had to decide that despite conflict they would continue in their vocations. Jeremiah alone seems to retain his awareness of his own humanity and self-consciousness, and does so within his dialogues with Yahweh when he questions Yahweh's motives, or complains about his lot - the so-called 'confessions'[32] a testament to his human frailty and stoicism in the face of divine demands[33].

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[23] See Ex 3:10; Jer 1:7; Isa 6:8-9; Ezek 2:3-4; Jer 39:15-16.
[24] See also the paradigmatic Servant's call in Deutero-Isaiah (49:1-4): 'while I was in my mother's womb he named me'.
[25] He is appointed 'over nations and over kingdoms', his prophetic work both destructive and constructive, imaging the two 'sides' of Yahweh as 'tyger' and 'lamb'
[26] See also Isaiah 49:1-3.
[27] See Ex 3:12; 4:12; Jer 15:20-21; Ezek 3:7-9.
[28] cf Amos 3:8 – 'The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?'. See also Jer 6:11 & 15:17; 25:30-31; and Num 22:38. Isaiah testifies: 'For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me' (Isa 8:11).
[29] cf Hopkins' 'Thou mastering me God!' & 'Thy terror, O Christ, O God' from 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' stanzas 1 & 2: G M Hopkins. The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. (4th ed) Eds. W H Gardner & N H Mackenzie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967. p51ff (hereinafter cited as Gardner)
[30] See Isa 6:8-9 where the Lord asks 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' and Isaiah answers: 'Here am I; send me!'.
[31] See Elijah: 1 Kings 19:10.
[32] See p48 below
[33] See Jer 20:7 for the compulsion that he feels.

Men appointed to hear or see the divine word of Yahweh may have surrendered their freedom within their experience of compulsion but paradoxically then enjoyed a unique kind of freedom, that of interpreting the word of God. The prophets saw value in the vocation of being a human mouthpiece for the divine word, and also believed there was value in the suffering of that vocation, because they believed they could make a difference. The prophet, because Yahweh's instrument, ensured that divine message existed, carried by human words and aimed at human comprehension. The mouthpiece knew the worth of his vocation even although it was personally damaging, for the divine authority invested in him allowed him a unique yet marginalised societal position within which he could instigate a unique and crucial dialogue with his fellow man. The nature of vocation rendered the prophet a disintegrated personality, a divided man of divided loyalties. Jeremiah may be called a 'tester' and 'refiner' of the people[34] but he was also continually tested and refined by God[35].

The very vocation which removed individuality and self-consciousness left behind uniquely personal testimony - prophetic texts exist as 'named' individuals comprising singular voices[36], experiences, and lives, within wider surrounding contexts of contemporary history and culture. Yahweh may have appropriated the prophets and, within a compelled vocation, removed their self-determination but their lives stand as testimony to belief in, and effort on behalf of Yahweh that ensures Yahweh himself lives on through them. It could be asked whether God exists at all without human beings to believe in, or refute him? This points to a necessary symbiosis between God's prophets and himself that renders them mutually interdependent. The prophetic message contains both the individual man and the word of God, compelled voice inseparable from human experience yet controlling it: the prophet's relationship with God is unequal[37]. Jeremiah cannot escape the intense and self-denying vocation which has been forced upon him (20:7). As a human being he is forced to question in order to try and understand his vocation with its powers and limitations, and this renders him free to think and feel, even rebel, but he is neither fully human with all of the freedoms and rights which that entails, nor yet a mere 'puppet' in Yahweh's hands[38].

This issue of control is crucial. In the Judeo-Christian tradition belief is beholden to, yet is still a free agent from, an intelligent yet benevolent being. This means that inspiration or

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[34] See Jer 6:27.
[35] See Jer 11:20 'who try the heart and the mind'; also 12:3 'you see me and test me'.
[36] The concept of 'voice' is complex, a 'Jeremiac' voice representing variously: the voice of God, the voice of self, *vox populi*, the voice of prophecy, the voice of the age. cf Hopkins' various voices: Ch 3, p118, footnote 331
[37] One indeed risks death if one sees God: Judg 13:22.
[38] Their suffering is martyr-like: one of dichotomy and schism as a result, of 'split personality' and fragmentation.

guidance can impel the individual but does not deny his freedom. Jeremiah's freedom, by comparison, seems to be curtailed by a compulsion from which he cannot escape. He is compelled in a way that the rest of us are not, viz poets, who attest to an element of compulsion (which can be attributed to differing labels of their experience of 'the other') when seized by the impulse to write. The experience of being inspired or compelled seems to comprise control from outside and a concomitant loss of self-determination. Creativity can use the individual *qua* instrument and at the moment of inception denies that individual his selfhood, just as it gives him heightened awareness of his life and being. As instrument of vision and agent of change, the inspired voice tells the poet how to see, how s/he should go: it provides a re-presentation of the world to both the poet's and others' sight[39].

Task

One of the tasks of the prophet was intercession on behalf of the people[40]. The people ask Moses[41] to be their representative before God (Ex 20:18-21), saying: 'You speak to us, and we will listen'[42]. This initiated a 'covenant' between the people and their prophetic representative, Moses, and between themselves and Yahweh. In time the people break both covenants and sunder themselves from their mortal medium as they do from their God. Jeremiah testifies that the human heart 'is devious above all else; it is perverse – who can understand it?' (17:9). It is to the devious and perverse condition of the human heart that the prophets are sent to speak.

To Deutero-Isaiah the Lord has given 'the tongue of a teacher' (Isa 50:4); to Isaiah of Jerusalem the task of a 'watcher'[43]. Jeremiah is described as being a 'tester' and a 'refiner' of the people so that he may 'know' and 'test' their ways (Jer 6:27) but he is already 'appointed' as a 'prophet to the nations' (1:5), his weighty remit 'to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant' (1:10)[44]. This involves passing judgement on mankind on behalf of Yahweh[45]. The prophets are also Yahweh's 'witnesses', his 'servants' whom he has chosen to attest to his reality (Isa 43:10-13). Ezekiel was made 'a sentinel for the house of Israel'; whenever he hears a word from

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[39] Poetry teaches by 're-presenting' the world to our sight in order that we might see anew: Aristotle argues that there are two causes which generate poetry, one: 'Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation'; two: 'everyone delights in representations ... we delight in looking at the most proficient images of things ... the cause of this is that learning is most pleasant ... they delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is' Poetics I (1987) 2.1 48b5ff p4 – our requirement to learn combines with learning through images, and these come together within poetry, a didactic medium

[40] See I Sam 12:19, 23; Jer 7:16, 42:1-4.

[41] See also Gen 20:7 where Abraham is described as being a prophet. cf I Sam 9:9 for transition of 'seer' to 'prophet'.

[42] cf Jer 42:1-6.

[43] See Isaiah 21:6-8; cf also Ezekiel 33:1-9, 3:16-21

[44] See also Isa 42:18-20 where Yahweh's prophets are 'servants' and 'messengers'; also 'dedicated ones'.

[45] Yahweh says repeatedly he has sent his prophets but no-one listens: Amos 3:7; Hos 6:5, 12:10; Jer 7:25, 25:4; II Kings 17:13.

Yahweh's mouth he must give the people 'warning' (Ezek 3:17; 33:7). Such teaching, testing and refining, overthrowing and building, and warning, allows the words of the prophets their 'noetic' function, as they bear, encapsulate and express ideas to the people about good and evil, behaviour, choice and orientation. As Yahweh's 'servants'[46] by so doing, they glorify the one who sent them (Isa 49:3). Yahweh declares that he gave Deutero-Isaiah as a 'light to the nations'[47] that his salvation would reach to the end of the earth (Isa 49:6)[48], showing that his grand plan reached well beyond the life-spans of his prophets and that it would live on within their words.

The prophets in turn have labels for Yahweh, pass judgement on him. He is perceived variously as a 'barber' (Isa 7:20), as the 'maggots' and 'rottenness' in Israel's body (Hos 5:12). In Jeremiah he is a 'fountain of living water' (Jer 2:13) who is also a 'deceitful brook, like waters that fail' (Jer 15:18). Yahweh is a 'potter' (Jer 18:1-11)[49] and in Isaiah fashions the 'clay' that is man, and in this context also creates the world and the natural order[50]. Yahweh also controls history, using individuals and nations like Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians as his servants (Jer 27:6). He is seen as the judge of men (Jer 17:10), testing hearts and minds[51], yet is a loving father (Jer 3:19)[52].

Critical Function

The critical function which the independent prophets carried out was based on the belief that Yahweh had a relationship (covenant[53]) with his people comprising the contrary yet synonymous ideals of judgement and salvation, and that he was lord of history directing events in fulfilment of his own pre-determined plan. Their critical function was also founded in the understanding that men had both rights and responsibilities before God. The prophets concerned themselves with the 'sins' that existed within human society: treachery; violence; oppression; greed; gluttony; exploitation; cruelty; anger; division; luxury gained at the expense of the poor; dishonesty; empty justice; lying; murder; and especially hypocrisy within a religious context. These 'sins' were seen as external markers

[46] cf also I Sam 9:6 where a prophet is described as a 'man of God'; cf I Kings 13:1; prophets described as 'servants' see II Kings 21:10; 24:2.
[47] cf also 42:1-4, 6-9 where Isaiah is given as a 'covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon'.
[48] cf also Isa 48:9-11 where Yahweh's deeds are done 'for my own sake' ... 'My glory I will not give to another'.
[49] cf Isa 29: 16
[50] See Jer 5:22; 8:7; 27:5; 10:12-13; 31:35-36.
[51] See also Jer 20:12; 29:23.
[52] See Jeremiah 15:5-8 for emphasis on Yahweh's power, expressed through list of active verbs: stretched; winnowed; bereaved; destroyed; brought; made etc.
[53] See Jer 24:5-7 where the 'new' covenant is promised by Yahweh: 'and they shall be my people and I will be their God'. cf 'O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me' (Isa 48:18-19). Had the people remained faithful to the covenant they would have prospered, benefits ensue from adhering to the true 'relationship' with Yahweh, judgement (purification) falls if one does not.

of a debased inner spiritual condition which was man's estrangement from God and which became evident in his practices and way of life. The prophets imply that a lack of true spirituality means a lack of moral knowledge and responsibility[54].

The prophets watch over the divine law of Yahweh; they also embody the covenant between Yahweh and the people: 'I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people' (Isa 49:8)[55]. The prophets are sent to critique and thereby challenge every form of miscarriage of justice and exploitation of the weak, for it is society's attitude towards the law and towards the individual members of that society which determines whether or not its relationship (covenant[56]) with Yahweh is sound. Man's attitude to God is shown by his behaviour[57]. The context or wider life within which the prophets work is organised society where appointed officials, judges, officers, elders, religious, all hold sway yet are often the *locus* for violations of the law[58]. Evils emanated from the form and ends of the social order itself, from the principles which it espoused and enshrined, and it meant that politics were seen to be man-driven rather than god-driven, alliances or hostilities formed without access to Yahweh's guiding hand[59]. The prophets viewed the history of the people as one of 'failure'[60], but this did not preclude them being filled with hope and being zealous on behalf of Yahweh in pursuit of Israel's 'return' to the fold, for if human shame and grief are possible, then new life can be real.

The prophets did not speak on behalf of any particular group, class or sect, or align themselves with any pre-existing strata of society. Rather they felt themselves bound to a particular moral code or underlying principle of life which their proclamations upheld and which it was their mission to restore[61]. This meant that the distinctions of rank which normally held sway in social/sacral institutions were irrelevant, for the authority and position which the prophets held existed outwith both. Their critical function comprised restoration of an ideal, redemption of the sins of the past, and realignment towards a

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[54] Robert Carroll comments: 'A common feature of these poetic collections is the open, and quite often *extreme hostility shown towards social institutions* in ancient Israel. The *fierce denunciation* of every aspect of social and religious life, king and temple, sacrifice and prayer, worship and values, indicate that these poets were *social critics* operating with a high level of theory. They may even have been *social reformers putting forward radical critiques* of society and arguing for serious changes in the life of the people' [my emphasis] Robert Carroll. 'Poets not Prophets. A response to "Prophets Through the Looking Glass"'. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. 27 (1983) 25-31 p26. (hereinafter cited as JSOT)

[55] This continues: 'to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages', to bring forth prisoners and to lead the people home. The prophets (here the suffering servant in Deutero-Isaiah as paradigm) are sent to establish the bedrock of faith upon which life can be built; land being of great importance to the maintenance of the Hebrew ideal of 'house' and lineage.

[56] See Isa 55:3 – 'I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David'.

[57] See Hos 2:19-20; Mic 6:8 for expressions of 'right' behaviour before God.

[58] See Hos 4:4-6; Mic 3:1-12; Amos 6:1-7; Isa 3:1-5, 13-15.

[59] See Isaiah's denunciation of man-centred politics: Isa 30:1-2ff; 31:1-3.

[60] See Amos 4:6-13 where Israel rejected 'correction'; and Hosea 11:1-11 where God shows compassion despite Israel's 'ingratitude'.

[61] See Jer 35:14b-15 where Yahweh has sent them 'persistently' but no-one is listening.

certain way of behaviour for the future. They proposed that to honour God one must accept as a sacred obligation the direction he gives to life[62]. They had a teaching and didactic function which was to further the moral improvement of man. This is where and why their rhetoricism comes to the fore as they attempt to explain and castigate people's sins, and teach that all choices have consequences. In short they wish for reorientation[63] of belief and behaviour towards the covenant with Yahweh and wish to teach the people that responsibility for themselves and their actions matters within the wider world[64]. Their rhetoric is didactic in its idealistic heart.

The hope of the prophet is that he will both challenge and change people's behaviour and attitudes. He seeks to move hearts and minds to a new point of view which is in fact reconstitution of and continuity from an old point of view[65], and he must do this by breaking hardened attitudes, values and traditions, fracturing what is (instigating discontinuity) in order to allow what should be to rise. This is an attempt at renewal of vision, a spiritual vision which is concerned with the welfare of the soul but one which is based on action, choice, and personal responsibility before God in the mundane world.

In Hebrew Bible terms this means that Yahweh ensures that the evil which men do merely rebounds on their own heads[66]. Choice and consequence are indissolubly linked, offence and punishment correspond, and the prophets attempt to access and disseminate an ideal moral order which is an appeal to the laws of God[67]. The overriding principles in human welfare should be moral and spiritual, from which may then flow correct economic and political organisation[68]. The prophets denounced the evils which they saw existing within their contextual social order in one historical time, but the congruence of their messages show that they believed the ongoing life of mankind lies beneath all eras and that man is continuously prey to the same inadequacies, wrong choices, moral dilemmas, and must continuously strive for right ethical behaviour. The evils of the social order of the Israelites in one time, are the evils of all social orders in all times, thus the prophetic texts

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[62] See R B Y Scott. The Relevance of the Prophets. Ontario, Canada: The Macmillan Company, 1969. p211

[63] Our intentions and actions define us, action indivisible from identity. The prophets' remit is to 'turn' people, 're-orientate' them towards different goals. Loyalty to Yahweh means orientation towards him and his requirements, deliberate 'walking' (action) with him defines the faithful and gives them their identity as God's people. One 'orientation' (action) is life-giving: 'the fountain of living water'; another 'orientation' (action) is life-denying: 'cracked cisterns that can hold no water' (Jer 2:13). See the 'return' refrain in Jer 3:11-23.

[64] See all instances of 'because' and 'therefore' within the texts used as rhetorical 'hooks' to link the crime with its punishment. See also the 'reap what you sow' message in Hos 10:12-14.

[65] '... the poet is he who, beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinships between things, their scattered resemblances' Michael Foucault. The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. Ed. R D Laing. London: Routledge, 1970. p49

[66] See Ezek 33:4-5; also Hos 8:7 and Jer 2:17 & 2:19 where action and consequence are closely linked; also Isa 3:9.

[67] For examples of crime and punishment, the evil rebounding on the perpetrator, see I Kings 21:19; Isa 5:18-24; Mic 3:9-12; Mic 2:1-3. Also Jer 17:4: 'By your own act you shall lose the heritage that I gave you'.

[68] See Jer 7:3-7; Isa 1:16-17.

have perennial relevance for the human condition which remains ultimately a phenomenon that lies outwith *chronos* or clock time.

Scott argues[69] that it is not legitimate to over-simplify the comparison of their situation and ours, and to transfer their individual sayings from one cultural and religious context to another which is very different, without recognizing the differences. Granted there will always be differences between one cultural context and religion, and another, but it is possible to simplify the comparison if access is made to the fact that beneath such societally constructed layers all human beings have a common ancestry and are bound together by common behavioural patterns, desires, conflicts, complexities and choices - and that these are inherent and universal. It is possible to relocate the difficulties which one culture had in dealing with inherent social evils which denied and oppressed the individual, with the invasion of its land and cities, with internal disintegration and loss of religion, to the knowledge and understanding we have of our own culture and its place in the wider world, and learn lessons thereby. For it is by seeing the ways in which people choose to live at the expense of others, or by seeing faith and obedience to a divine imperative in action, that we are given new vistas, a new 'geography' within which we might orientate ourselves. Through such analysis and parallel understanding we can come to see other ways of construing the world.

Contexts:

The Hebrew Bible prophets were men of an ancient world who were both guided and defined by an inherited historical and religious tradition. The essence of a prophet was to be rooted in the religious practices which he inherited, looking back on the past and appropriating their relevance for the present[70]. Israel's living history was based on a recognised sequence of events which involved Yahweh's intervention on her behalf[71] - that of being accompanied by her God. The prophets were driven primarily by their response to context: both intellectually in terms of theological positioning and politically/socially in terms of prevailing circumstances.

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[69] Scott (1969) p173

[70] See Deut 26:5ff & Josh 24:2ff for summaries of the saving history.

[71] A S Herbert comments: 'A distinctive feature of the Old Testament is its profound interest in history – not primarily in the rise and fall of kingdoms or empires but in *history as the arena of God's activity*' [my emphasis] A S Herbert. The Cambridge Bible Commentary. (The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chs 1-39). London: Cambridge University Press, 1973. p1

Theological Context

Hosea took his stand on the Israel-Covenant tradition[72] along with a 'renewed' entry into the land[73], underlined by the usual prophetic focus on personal and conditional salvation dominated by behaviour and choice[74]. Hosea was concerned with the threat to Yahwism from the Canaanite worship of Baal[75] and saw Israel's predilection for this god as being a metaphoric whoredom. Israel had forsaken Yahweh like a faithless wife and Hosea uses the extended *leitmotiv* of his own failed marriage to analogue the broken relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Israel brings judgement upon herself (5:4) and this comes by way of disaster at the behest of her enemies[76]. Yahweh cannot forget her deeds[77] yet paradoxically, salvation will come: 'My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim ... I will not come in wrath' (11: 8-9). Judgement is not a definitive act, merely a precursor of hope, salvation and redemption[78]. Hosea critiques what is not right with human choice and behaviour[79] in order to highlight change and realignment[80]. His words are didactic and are aimed at restoration of an ideal.

Isaiah of Jerusalem[81] appealed to the Zion-David tradition[82], ('election' traditions[83]) also taking the 'sanctuary' line of an impersonal and unconditional salvation granted by grace alone[84]. The indications are that Isaiah was a privileged person possibly working within court circles, for he had ease of access to kings Ahaz and Hezekiah[85], had a relationship with state officials[86] and knowledge of state policy[87]. A central theme in Isaiah's theology

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[72] See 6:7; 9:9-10; 10:9; 11:1-4; 12:4; 12:13; 13:4-6 for references rooted in the saving history.
[73] See Hos 1:11.
[74] The independent prophets insisted on the conditional nature of an individual's relationship with Yahweh which rested on behaviour and choice. The theology of the Royal Sanctuaries by contrast was that of unconditional salvation for Israel based on the 'election' traditions which celebrated God's unconditional promise to save king and people by always destroying foreign foes. The cult promised the people (an unrealistic) unconditional security. Amos points out that the election traditions do not give Israel any more security than her foes have: cf 9:7-8; 6:8; 7:9.
[75] See Hos 4:12-14.
[76] See 8:3; 10:14; 11:5-6; 13:15-16.
[77] See 7:2; 8:13; 9:9.
[78] See Hos 2:14-15. See also Jer 33:4-9 for a description of salvation and restoration following destruction: 'I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security'. See also Jer 30:18; 33:10.
[79] Similarly Amos 'The kingdom appeared to the outer eye to be enjoying great prosperity under King Jeroboam II, but the prophet could see that prosperity had been purchased at the expense of the poor and that organized religion was making no effort to remind the well-to-do of their humane obligations to their less fortunate neighbours'. Amos denounced the apostate religion and the social injustice that he saw around him. Gabel, Wheeler, York. The Bible as Literature: An Introduction. 3rd edn. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. p126
[80] See Mic 6:8 where it is clearly stated that to do justice and to love kindness is to walk humbly with God.
[81] Son of Amoz 742-701BC
[82] See Isa 1:26-27 for the redemption of Zion. See 11: 1-9 for a Messianic theme relating to the coming of a 'new' David (viz. the ref to Jesse, his father) who will restore the glory of the original Davidic empire (vv 6-9 relating to the peace which will accompany this reign). See also Isa 7: 10-17 & Isa 9: 6-7, also Isa 16:5. In addition to this, Isaiah makes reference to the Exodus: 4:5-6, the pillar of cloud and fire, also 11:15-16 (Ex 13:21f).
[83] See Amos 3:1-2 for an expression of 'election' by Yahweh; also Isa 43:1.
[84] See Isa 2: 1-4 for the coming reign of God; see also Isa 12: 1-6 for praise of Yahweh and Isa 25: 1-12 for the Lord's unconditional salvation of the people, viz Isa 32:16-20.
[85] See 7:3ff; 37:21f; 38:1-8; 39:5-8.
[86] See 8:2; 22:15-25.
[87] See 30:1-2; 37:14ff; 39:1-4.

is the emphasis on faith: 'If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all' (Isa 7:9). Isaiah also condemned the people[88] as other prophets do for their choice of behaviour which estranges them from Yahweh through their breaking of the 'covenant' (1:4); empty religious observances are criticised (1:12-14); exploitation of the poor and needy is condemned along with empty justice (10:1-2). Correct behaviour is exhorted: 'cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow' (1:16-17). Miscarriages of justice are Isaiah's concern, human justice being a correlative to divine justice. He sees humanity's attitude to its own laws as being a marker of its attitude to God's, for 'Zion shall be redeemed by justice' (1: 27)[89]. Justice is linked with 'mercy', and judgement is fulfilled when renewal of life comes after injustice and violence have been removed[90].

Jeremiah makes reference to the Exodus-Sinai tradition (2:1-7) and the Davidic (Messianic) tradition (23:5-6)[91]. He makes early reference to the foe from the north, the neo-Babylonians (Jer 1:13) and complains of the apostasy of Israel (2:8, 13). The people have brought upon themselves their own downfall (2:17) by forsaking their God (2:19). Jeremiah's 'temple speech' (26:1ff) in 609BC condemned as false the popular belief that the mere presence of the temple in Jerusalem was a guarantee against divine judgement for the people's apostasy (cf 7:1-15). Regaining a new covenant with Yahweh means that the people will have regained humanity for each other[92], that their behaviour will have changed and the much-vaunted 'justice' and 'righteousness' will have prevailed[93]. In chapter 29 Jeremiah writes to the exiles encouraging them to settle and assuring them of Yahweh's care saying that their release from bondage will come, and he instructs them to pray for their enemies. Jeremiah sees beyond Yahweh's judgement towards a new beginning in the relationship between Israel and her God. The setting-right of the people's relationship with Yahweh hinges on a fracture of what is and a corresponding realignment towards what should be – it is reaching towards an ideal and through this, though rejected and cast out of her homeland, Yahweh will take Israel back (46:27). This 'type' of event is representative (archetypal) of what the prophets see as an ongoing and cyclic process of discontinuity and redemption/restoration that continues to occur within the progression of the Israelites' (and by extension all of humanity's[94]) experience in time – that this is

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[88] See Isaiah 5:8-23 for specific condemnations of the people's behaviour; also 10:1-4.
[89] See full reference to restoration of justice in 1:26-28.
[90] See 29:17-24 & 32:16-17; also 32:1-8.
[91] See also Jer 30:8-9 & 33:14-26.
[92] See Jer 9: 1-6 where Jeremiah laments the conduct of the people which has divorced them from their God.
[93] See Jer 5:26-29 for his condemnation of man's behaviour to his fellow man.
[94] This is Israel as personified mankind whose heart is naturally perverse (Jer 17:9); Israel's sin is part of her nature therefore man's sin is part of his nature (Jer 13:23) but future renewal is not ruled out, Yahweh can change the hearts of the people and bring about a new covenant (31:31ff).

'eschatological' man who continues to sin but who continues to be redeemed before Yahweh (Zeph 3:8-13)[95].

These visions of renewal are an attempt at correct realignment of the relationship between the chosen people, the 'elect', and Yahweh[96]. The prophetic vision was often eschatological in its scope seeing all things *sub specie aeternitatis* and fervent in its belief that renewal (redemption) was totally possible[97]. 'Saving' actions on the part of Yahweh were allocated to the future[98], yet still held their roots and lineage in the known saving actions of the past[99]. The basis of salvation for the people had access to their past[100], yet authority through the prophetic (gifted) words of the present[101], and hope for the future based on attested prophetic vision and the moral conscience of men who had direct access to their God. Historical events were 're-enacted' at various festival times[102] which had the effect of rendering these part of an ongoing living tradition where the past was continuously being ingathered to the present. This inheritance of history found its place within the framework of the official 'cultus' and the rhythm of the calendar year. The shrine at Bethel kept alive the tradition of Jacob, Shechem was where the festival of the renewal of the covenant took place, and at Gilgal there was commemoration of the conquest and the Passover/Exodus events. These festivals were pilgrimage events[103].

Deutero-Isaiah worked within three election traditions, that of the Exodus[104], David[105], and Zion[106]. Cyrus is seen as being the tool of the Lord[107]: 'He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose' (Isa 44:28)[108]. This correlates with other prophetic books[109] where the enemies of Israel are, variously, tools in Yahweh's hand to enable him to

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[95] All references to the eschatological day of the Lord (*Dies Irae*): 'on that day' have a bearing here. See Isa 2:12, 20; 4:2; 7:18-25. The prophetic vision of Yahweh as embodying the qualities of both 'tyger' and 'lamb' reside within the two 'sides' of *Dies Irae* manifestation, the day of 'judgement' (Isa 13:9-13) as destructive and coming with fierce wrath and anger, set against the day of 'salvation' (Isa 12:1-6) which comprises faith, joy, praise and the presence of Yahweh 'in the midst' of his people. See also Isa 19:22: 'The Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing'; Isa 35:4: 'Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you'. Also Isa 45:7: 'I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things'. cf Isa 54:7-8 for the dichotomy of 'abandonment' and 'compassion'; 'wrath' and 'love'.

[96] Because Yahweh is 'entering into judgement with all flesh, and the guilty he will put to the sword' (Jer 25:31).

[97] See Jer 33:6-13 for Yahweh's promise of redemption, renewal and restoration.

[98] See Isaiah 51:8 – 'my deliverance will be forever, and my salvation to all generations'.

[99] See Amos's reference to history in 2:9-11 with its attendant insistence on traditions.

[100] See Deut 5:2-3 for re-appropriation of the covenant for the present; see also Deut 29:9ff.

[101] See Jeremiah 25:17ff for a list of real people, place names, kingdoms etc which ground the text in real contextual politics and geography. See also Isa 10:28-32.

[102] See Isaiah's reference to festival times in Jerusalem – 29:1.

[103] See Gerhard Von Rad. The Message of the Prophets. Tr. D M G Stalker. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968. p84ff

[104] This was probably the 'main' tradition upon which he built, see refs: Isa 43:16-21; 48:20-21; 51:10; 52:11-12 – for Abraham refs: 41:8; 51:2 – refs to Jacob: 43:1, 22; 48:1; 44:1-2. Also ref to the parting of the Red Sea: Isa 51:10.

[105] For Davidic refs see: 55:3-4 (cf II Chron 6:42)

[106] See Isa 51:11; 52:1-2; 51:3. See also 44:26; 45:13; 49:14-16; 54:1-3, 11-14 for motifs of the rebuilding and restoration of Zion.

[107] See the central motif of the 'Cyrus oracle': 44:24-45:7.

[108] See also Isa 41:25; 48:14-15; 45:1-7; 41:2-4; 45:13; cf Amos 6:14 (re Assyria); 3:11.

[109] For example, Cyrus is Yahweh's instrument just as the Assyrians were during the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem; see also Jer 27:5-8 where Yahweh gives dominion to the Babylonians and Nebuchadrezzar II.

progress his purposes as well as punishing his people for their transgressions. Another *leitmotiv* which Deutero-Isaiah uses is that of Yahweh being creator of the world, his auspices wider, deeper and grander than his singular interest in his own elect (43:1) the Israelites[110]. He is praised accordingly (40:12-31). As the Lord formed Israel, so can he grant redemption (see 44:21-23). Creation is allied to redemption, as if the two can be one and the same act. This is Yahweh's 'soteriological' function, Isaiah emphasising his will to save his people by realigning their vision, renewing their lives – their sins the 'clouds' and 'mists' (Isa 44:22) which he will sweep away so they can see clearly and thereby reorientate themselves towards him. Deutero-Isaiah represents Yahweh as not merely the creator and redeemer of Israel, but the creator and redeemer of the whole world[111]. He presents a God who is active in the world, in the historical arena just as in the contemporary, one who brings about change and progress and who moulds his people for his own designs and ends (48:9-11).

Trito-Isaiah has an office of comfort and pastoral care (61:1-4). Within the context of the return home were social abuses and bad conditions, the rulers, the rich and the officials doing nothing for the poor (56:10-12). Isaiah complains of the prevailing injustice and oppression (59:1-8). The ideal of Zion[112] (salvation leading to transformation) is uppermost in Isaiah's mind[113] – it is the goal of restoration and reconstruction (52:1-2)[114]. God's chosen people will serve as a light for all (60:1-3; 61:9), Isaiah promising that the people's hardships will change (60:17), treasure will come to Jerusalem (60: 6, 9) and peace will be restored (62:8-9). Peaceful negotiations with foreign nations will resume (60:10-11) and most importantly the city's ruins will be rebuilt (61:4) and the diaspora reversed (60:4, 9) – all of this in defiance of the realities of the contemporary situation. The scene is that of the 'earthly' and 'real' Jerusalem but Isaiah has the ideal of the 'new Jerusalem' (65: 17-25) in mind as well[115]. He believes that salvation can be conceived in

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[110] See 40:25-28; 43:1-7; 44:24-28. Along with this idea goes imagery of the natural world which confirms Yahweh to be Lord of the earth, and in anthropomorphic fashion extols him for his deeds: 42:10; 43:20; 44:23; 49:13; 55:12.

[111] See Isa 42:5.

[112] For an expression of the ideal restoration of Zion see Isa 60:19-22.

[113] He makes recourse to the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea, mentioning Moses, in order to bring Yahweh's past 'saving' actions up-to-date and relevant to the contemporary situation (Isa 63:7-14); emphasising that what Yahweh has done in the past, he can do again in the present. A prayer follows, asking that the Lord re-orientate himself towards his people, for him to 'turn back' for the sake of his servants (63:15-19); the prayer contains knowledge of sin (cf 64:5b) and understanding of consequence, also awareness and acknowledgement of Yahweh's absence (cf 64:4a); ie: the people have learned their lesson – prophetic vocation has been successful – there has been awakening of vision (64:6 & 64:8). Yahweh's reply comprises chs 65-66 and touches on many of the themes of the prophetic texts: false gods; empty observances; action & consequences; retribution & salvation; restoration of Zion; remnant motif; a new heaven & new earth; the flourishing of the faithful ('your bodies shall flourish like the grass' (66:14) reversing the withering and transience simile in 40:6-7); plenty & peace; culminating in a crescendo: all flesh shall worship Yahweh.

[114] See also 62:1-12 & 58:12.

[115] cf Blake's ideal of the 'new Jerusalem': hymn in the Preface to 'Milton': 'And did those feet in ancient time'; also prefatory hymns to 'Jerusalem' II, 'To the Jews': 'The fields from Islington to Marybone'; and IV 'To The Christians': 'England! awake! awake! awake!'. Complete Poems (1977) pp514, 686, 799

terms of this world – it is not always a question of waiting for the next[116]. Isaiah emphasises that serving Yahweh is, in a time of need, to serve one another: he wants no hollow religious observances (58:1-5), rather he wants righteous behaviour (58:6-11) but also wants the temple rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored[117]. The temple was eventually rebuilt by 516BC and worship of Yahweh restored to this ancient site in the reign of Darius I (522-486).

Amos was critical of the gulf that existed between the rich and the poor[118]. A catalogue of sins are listed by Amos: murder and hatred (1:11), exploitation of the poor, moral laxity and religious profanation (2:6-8), slothful behaviour of the idle rich especially women (4:1-3), empty and hypocritical religious observances rather than correct behaviour (5:21-23), dishonest business transactions at the expense of the poor (8:4-6) and injustices (5:10-13). Yahweh's intervention is shown by Amos to be a result of these transgressions for he will pass through the midst of the people (5:17) and will 'rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword' (7:9) for his eyes are upon the sinful kingdom and he will destroy it from the face of the earth (9:8). Amos in his condemnation of behaviour and expectation of judgement provides guidelines for people to live within and thereby re-orient their ways. His critique comprises assumptions about what is correct and right behaviour before God, his judgement and by extension Yahweh's judgement contain the seeds of salvation within them for judgement is a chance for change. At the end of Amos from 9:11-15, 'on that day' – the day of the Lord, the day of judgement – there will be restoration and renewal, the fallen 'booth of David' will be repaired and raised-up and the fortunes of the people will be restored[119], if (and salvation is always conditional upon if [120]) the people change their ways as Yahweh has told them through the mouths of his prophets.

Ezekiel, who came from a priestly family, is more concerned with offences against sacrality, his critique of personal and social transgressions less overt. Ezekiel condemns the defiling of the sanctuaries (5:11), the religious apostasy of Israel (8:5-18), and idol worship (14:3-8). The 'statutes' and 'ordinances' of Yahweh are the benchmarks for Israel to follow (5:5-9)[121]. He also idealises the restoration of the new Jerusalem with a 'blueprint' of the Temple, its priesthood and worship (Chs 40-48). Ezekiel in line with

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[116] Isa 59:1-21 serves as a summary of prophetic (thereby redemptive and ameliorative) teaching. Vv 1-8 provide a 'list' of bad deeds; v 9 contains the *volta* 'therefore' which gives 'consequence' to the perpetrators; v 12 'for' begins the summary of what ensues from the consequences; vv 15b-19 contain Yahweh's response and purpose; vv 20-21 the promise of redemption and of prophetic continuity.

[117] See Isa 56:7 & 60:7.

[118] See critical comments on the wealthy upper classes living at the expense of the poor: Amos 5.11; 6:4-7; 8:4-6.

[119] See Isaiah 4:2-6 for a similar restoration promise.

[120] See Jer 4:1-4 for repetition of 'if' linking with 'then', 'or else' logic clauses. Also Jer 18:7-11: if the people are penitent and turn to Yahweh, then salvation is possible.

[121] See also Ezek 20:1-26 for repetition of these words as a 'refrain' which links the chapter together.

other prophets saw judgement as a purifying force, one that held the seeds of renewal and redemption within it[122]. Judgement was not for him a merely destructive force, a remnant would always remain phoenix-like to re-propagate the nation. What is 'right' before Yahweh is spelt out in detail: 18:5-9, this chapter emphasising that every life is in a direct relationship with God and the individual must take responsibility for the direction of that life for Yahweh will 'judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways' (18:30)[123]. Ezekiel was zealous in pursuit of the restitution of the 'new covenant', declaring that the Lord would put a new spirit and a new heart[124] into the people and they would again be his people and he their God (Ezek 36:24-28)[125]. Ezekiel himself never returned to Palestine.

Standing close to God, for the prophets, involved a re-presentation of ancient ideas and beliefs in order to attempt to realign (re-orientate) the people towards a truer religion, one of 'return'[126] (oft-used) to Yahweh. Their language is a rhetorical one of didactic vision and persuasion in order to challenge and change the hardened attitudes and habitual practices of a people who were no longer walking with their God. The prophets attempted to instigate a radical discontinuity in all areas of life in order to provide access to a deeper continuity of correct behaviour that was in turn, access to their God, and they did this by working within and against theological context.

Prevailing Conditions

The prevailing political and social contexts of the prophetic texts were the frames of reference within which messages of restoration, renewal and redemption involving changes of attitude and behaviour were proclaimed. *Telling forth* current conditions was a major component of prophetic vocation - to realign vision by incurring a re-seeing of events, a 'seeing into' the present that interprets it 'insightedly' by understanding its wider reasons and implications. This is part of the worded vision which the prophets sought to pass on to the people from Yahweh. Each prophet stands uniquely in relation to the history of Yahweh and Israel, and it is political and social context which determines the specific message of each. They have a 'horizontal' relationship with their social and political

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[122] See Ezek 20:37; 22:17-22; 24:11.

[123] See also Ezekiel's emphasis that if the people could die to sin, they would live to righteousness: Ezek 33:10-11; the extended metaphor for this in 37:1-14.

[124] Ezek 11: 19; For the Hebrews the 'heart' was the seat of the intelligence and the will rather than of the emotions. Scott (1969) p47

[125] For a similar sentiment in Jeremiah, see 31:31ff, & 32:38-39.

[126] See Jer 3:11-22 with a 'return' refrain linking the sense; *viz* Amos 4:6-13 for refrain 'yet you did not return to me'. 'Return' to Yahweh proposed as alternative to judgement: Amos 5:4-6: 'Seek me and live', 'Seek the Lord and live'. See also Jer 18:15 where people choose the wrong road; also emphasis on road markers, signposts etc designating choice of direction: Jer 31:21 & Isa 30:21. The idea of 'turn' gives a 'once-only' action; whereas the idea of 're-turn' connotes always returning, continually 'turning again', linking with never-ending cycles of judgement and salvation. Yahweh wants the whole world to 'turn' (Isa 45:22).

history yet also a 'vertical' relationship to Yahweh's intervention in that history. There generally prevail some conditions of crisis in either faith, behaviour, or attitudes; or historical shifts, changes and challenges which pressurise and sculpt events to which the prophets rise and against which their prophetic muse emerges and becomes active.

Hosea for example was active during the last years of the Northern Kingdom in the second half of the 8th century, 750-730BC. The kingdom at this time was prosperous but heading towards destruction at the hands of the Assyrians in 721BC. Hosea could target his rhetoric at the behaviour of the prosperous who personified Israel's repudiation of Yahweh whilst warning of future disaster.

Isaiah of Jerusalem worked within three major crises in Judah's history towards the end of the 8th century BC: the death of kings Jeroboam II of Israel in 746BC and Uzziah of Judah in 742BC marking the end of a period of security and prosperity for the two states. The fate of the Israelite kingdoms was part of a larger process, that of Assyria expanding and contesting the declining power of Egypt. By 732 the two kingdoms were subjugated and most of Israel turned into an Assyrian province[127]. The first crisis of Isaiah's mission was the context of King Ahaz seeking protection from Assyria (734BC) against the coalition of Syria and Philistia – Isaiah tells Ahaz 'do not fear' in the face of the threat from Rezin and Pekah, but Ahaz rejects his advice to remain calm (Isa 7:1-9). The second crisis involved King Hezekiah's (715-687BC) repeated attempts to assert his independence from Assyria (Isa 30:15-17) by seeking the protection of Egypt (even although Isaiah advised against it: 31:1-3). The third and final contextual event was Assyria's crushing of Judah's rebellion in 701BC[128], the 14th year of Hezekiah (Sennacherib's invasion) when Jerusalem was under siege (Isa 36). Assyria is interpreted as 'the rod' of Yahweh's anger (10:5-11), the 'club' in his hands which he has sent against a 'godless nation'.

Jeremiah, working in Jerusalem, born during the reign of Josiah of Judah (640-609) and active during 627-c587 (experiencing the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC) hoped for a 'new covenant' (31:31-4) that would restore the fortunes of the people. Jehoiakim, (Josiah's son), King of Judah (609-598) was oppressive to the people, reversing the religious reforms of his father[129] and remaining subservient to the Egyptians; Jeremiah opposed him during the term of his reign. After the battle of Carchemish (on the Euphrates) in 605 when the Egyptians and Assyrians were defeated and Nebuchadrezzar acceded to the

[127] Isaiah saw this as Yahweh's judgement on Israel: 10:5-11.
[128] Isaiah viewed the rebellion and the Egyptian alliance which supported it as a sin against Yahweh: 30:1-7; 31:1-3.
[129] Josiah's reforms based on Deuteronomy (622BC) – see II Kings 22:1-23:25, cf II Chron 34 – centralised worship in Jerusalem; the book of Deuteronomy is viewed as the product of reformers trying to renew the nation's loyalty to Yahweh and to stamp out the Canaanite religion and cults which were popular and widespread.

throne of Babylon, Jehoiakim transferred loyalty to the Babylonians, the dominant power. Judah suffered two invasions, in 602BC and 598BC when Jerusalem was besieged and Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (598-597), along with leading citizens were carried into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah's mission covered a period of 40 years, during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. He worked within a context of crisis and change in the international situation as Yahweh was about to bring Judah under the dominion of the Babylonian empire (27:5ff). He prophesied that capture of the city was certain[130] and he advised King Zedekiah (597-587) to capitulate (38:17-18). Within the context of 587BC then, when Jerusalem again fell to Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 32:36) and there was a second and more extensive deportation of Judaeans to Babylon, Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant that went further than the 'old'covenant of Sinai (32:37-41) which the people had 'broken' in favour of the syncretistic worship practices of the day[131].

Deutero-Isaiah (587-539BC) worked within the context of the emergence of the Persian Empire in 538, with its leader Cyrus (44:28-45:7), and the resultant collapse of Babylon (47:1-15)[132]. When Judah was destroyed, Deutero-Isaiah[133] living with the exiles in Babylon attempted to comfort[134] them with the message of a 'new salvation'[135] based on the surviving remnant who had been chosen to be the new shoots of a saved society (43:5-7)[136]. Joy should accompany such an event, and Isaiah exhorts the people to be joyful at what the Lord has accomplished in bringing them home[137]. He attempts to bring to the people a 'new vision' of Yahweh, a God great and powerful who is capable of all things[138]. He also emphasised a 'new Exodus' (43:16ff; 52:11-12), the release from Babylon reminiscent of the deliverance from Egypt[139].

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[130] See Jer 37:8, 17; 38:3; 34:2.
[131] See Jeremiah's protests against human sacrifice, 'the Moloch cult' (7:31f) and also against the cult of the 'Queen of Heaven' (7:18).
[132] See also Jeremiah Chs 50-51.
[133] Chapters 40-55 (587-539BC).
[134] See Isa 40:1ff: 'Comfort, O comfort my people … speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins'.
[135] For Deutero-Isaiah's characteristic oracles of salvation see: 41:8-16; 43:1-7; 44:1-5; 52:8-9. These are 'assurances' of salvation, different to 'proclamations' of salvation which speak of events in the future not yet happened: 41:17-20; 42:14-17; 43:16-21; 49:7-12.
[136] The idea of 'remnant' is pervasive, with a double meaning, that of a people or community cut down until only a few survive, a pejorative sense based on the 'judgement' of Yahweh (Amos 5:3; Isa 10:19); but also that of 'salvation' as Yahweh has left a few survivors in order that the people can be built up and 'planted' again – the idea of 'new shoots' in a positive sense (Jer 5:18; Amos 3:12; Isa 20-21; Isa 60:21). 'Remnant' also has an eschatological sense: Israel herself is the 'new shoot' that will in time fill the 'whole world with fruit' (Isa 27:6).
[137] See 40:9; 52:8-9; 51:11; 54:1; 42:11.
[138] See passages where Yahweh speaks of himself and what he is capable of: 41:4; 43:10-13, 15; 44:6-8; 44:24-28; 45:3, 5-6; 45:12; 45:18-19, 21; 46:4, 8-9; 48:12.
[139] The wanderings in the wilderness are described in terms of the past event, the idea of 'wilderness' transformed by Yahweh into green places: 43:19-21; 55:12-13; 51:11; 49:9-11. Yahweh as 'leader': 42:16; 48:20-21.

Similarly, Trito-Isaiah[140] working with the exiles who had returned home to ruin and devastation in 538BC when the Persian empire was born following the capture of Babylon, promised them the reconstitution of a 'new Jerusalem' (65:18-25), a just society where the rule of Yahweh would adhere. Both Deutero and Trito-Isaiah try to persuade their respective peoples of their special missions within their situations, in order to militate against the prevailing devastation and provide hope for the future.

Amos was active during a period of relative peace and prosperity for Israel and Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom (786-746BC). The Assyrians were on the horizon however, and with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) Assyria gathered strength under his rule and became a threat to the two Kingdoms. Amos 5:27 points to exile with the Assyrians in mind[141]. His message is mainly one of condemnation of the behaviour of the prosperous, reflecting the ease of the times.

Ezekiel (593-570/1BC)[142] arrived in Babylon along with the first deportation of Judaeans in 597. He was called to be a prophet in 593. In the political context, Assyria had declined from the international scene (32:22-23ff) and Judah, in danger from Babylon, sought Egyptian help but was to be disappointed. Nebuchadrezzar II (605-562) advances towards Judah (21:18-22) and Jerusalem falls (33:21). Ezekiel attempts to call the people back to God amid a time of change (his own roots are in the sacral tradition of the priesthood), emphasising the foundational strength of Temple worship.

The rise of Assyria during the 8th century onwards and the resulting threat to Palestine was the context within which Hosea, Amos and Isaiah all progressed their vocations. From this time on, the political independence of Israel and Judah was at an end. When Assyria declined during the mid 7th century, finally collapsing in 612, the neo-Babylonians came to power, 'the threat from the north', and from 597/587 Judah was demolished.

The pre-exilic period, then, comprises the 8th and 7th centuries – the 8th century the time of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah, dominated by Assyria; and the 7th century the time of Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah, dominated by Babylon. The exilic period comprised the 6th century, where thoughts of restoration, reconstitution and reconstruction were uppermost in the thoughts of Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel, Trito-Isaiah, Haggai and

[140] Chapters 56-66 (537-455BC).
[141] Also 2:13ff; 3:11; 5:3; 6:14; 7:9; 8:3; 9:10 – all prophecies of the future by Amos showing that Israel will suffer badly at the hands of a stronger opponent, there will be military defeats, disaster and exile; he had the Assyrians in mind.
[142] Approximate dates of ministry.

Zechariah. The remaining prophetic texts: Obadiah, Malachi, Joel and Jonah relate to the period after 500BC.

The belief in Yahweh's intervention in the political arena of human life and activity drove the prophets to work within and against historical and social context. They believed that Yahweh's intervention in the historical framework of the Israelite experience was not a 'once only' event but (as Yahweh insisted) was part of a wider and ongoing scheme of his own making. All of their pronouncements to the people regarding behaviour, choice, orientation, acceptance, judgement, hope and salvation, depended upon their interpretation of historical events and comprised Yahweh's 'progressive revelation' of self-disclosure to the world, inspired within living voice and gathered within text.

Authority/authenticity

One of the main issues surrounding prophecy is that of authority and authenticity. These ask how the people, faced with testimony from an individual who claims to be in receipt of a prophetic message, can tell the difference between the 'true' prophets of Yahweh and the 'false'. On the one hand, the official prophets operating at the side of the priests within the parameters of the cultus were there to preside at official festivals and carry out an intercessory function on behalf of the people[143] and the King[144], the prophetic office often being an hereditary one. Their authority rested on this publicly-sanctioned role. The 'independents' on the other hand, the named prophets of the Hebrew Bible, presented themselves in opposition to the official cultus[145] and very often had no priestly provenance at all and no official status in the eyes of the public institutions and the law[146]. They upheld temple worship but not the hypocrisy that often went with it. Their position was a precarious one, their (dubious) authority resting solely upon their testimony[147] of call and commissioning from Yahweh[148] as well as the ongoing reception (inspiration[149]) of his

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[143] See II Kings 4:22-23, 27; 23: 2; Isa 28:7; Mic 3:11.
[144] See Amos 7:12-13.
[145] See Isa 28:7; Mic 3:11; Zeph 3:4; Jer 5:30-31; see also Jer 26:7-16 where he is arrested and the priests and temple prophets are against him but the people are on his side; see also I Kings 22 where Micaiah ben Imlah opposes the 400 'official' prophets of the king.
[146] They did however organise themselves into 'guilds', see: I Sam 10: 5-10; 19: 19-24; II Kings 2: 3, 5, 15; 4: 1-7, 38; 6: 1, 2.
[147] See for example Isaiah's testimony that: 'The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing' (Isa 5:9).
[148] See Isa 6:8; Jer 1:10.
[149] Inspiration is described, variously, as 'the spirit of God' coming upon the prophet: Num 11:24-25; Judg 6:34; I Sam 10:10; Isa 61:1; Ezek 11:5 – also 'the hand of the Lord' came upon: Ezek 33:22, 37:1; Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17. See also II Tim 3:16-17: 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work'. cf the 'breath' or 'spirit' of God, the active outgoing of divine power in creation: Ps 33:6; Job 33:4; Gen 1:2, 2:7; what is created by breath/spirit can also be destroyed by it: Job 34:14. Further references to spirit working through the prophets: Isa 48:16; Mic 3:8; spirit as redemptive force: Ezek 36:27; breath as judgement: Isa 30:28, 33. cf II Pet 1:19-21 with respect to prophecy being of the Holy Spirit spoken from God. See also 'wind' as invisible and mysterious power: Jer 10:13; Hos 13:15; Jonah 4:8. The sirocco, a searing wind from the desert, is often used to describe divine judgement (Isa 27:8).

word[150]. These isolated and charismatic figures without sanctioned authority nonetheless gained the attention of the populace at pilgrimages and festivals, as the people's opposition to them attests. The only legitimisation they had, apart from their claim to speak with the authority of their God[151], was their appeal to inherited tradition both historical and religious which provided them with an accepted base upon which to build. Their allegiance toYahweh singled them out and any prophet who advised going after other gods was deemed to be 'false'[152].

Jeremiah denounces the official prophets (23:9-32) as 'ungodly' who prophesy 'by Baal' and lead the people astray. They are also accused of committing adultery and walking in lies. The people are instructed by Yahweh not to 'listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you' (23:16ff) - he 'did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied'. However Yahweh uses false prophets for his own ends, I Kings 22:19-23 attesting to the fact that the Lord has deliberately put a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets as if they too were instrumental in contributing to the progression of a pre-determined plan. Easy complacency seems to be another marker of falsehood[153], false prophets claiming that calamity will not happen. Making the people forget Yahweh's name is a further marker of falsehood, as is dreaming and interpreting dreams[154]. 'What has straw in common with wheat?' asks the Lord, encouraging his adherents to discriminate between the two. Amos distinguishes himself from the lineage of official prophets (7:14-15: 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son' … 'the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'')[155]. Even although Amos deems himself to be a 'true' prophet by the criteria of not being a member of the cultus and being in receipt of a divine call for which he was specially chosen, the responsibility for telling a true prophet from a false lies squarely on the

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Idols are seen as 'false' because they have no 'breath' (ie: life) in them: Jer 10:14; 51:17 as compared with the 'breath' and 'spirit' Yahweh gives to people (Isa 42:5).

[150] For indications of inspired utterance see: Ezek 11:5; Isa 48:16; 61:1; Joel: 2:28-29; Hos 9:7; Deut 18:15-18.

[151] The prophets were 'spokesman', 'mouths' of Yahweh; see Ex 4:10-17 which discusses the relationship between Yahweh and Moses, and Moses and his brother Aaron: 'You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him'. Prophets also seen as 'messengers' of Yahweh, prefacing their words or ending their oracles with: 'Thus says the Lord'; the Hebrew word for prophet: *nabhi* means 'spokesman' or 'messenger', see II Chron 36:15-16.

[152] See Deut 13: 1-5; 18: 20-22. Also Jer 23:13.

[153] See Jer 6:14; 14: 13-16. See also Jeremiah's confrontation with Hananiah (Jer 27:1-28:17) where Jeremiah sees Babylon as the instrument of God's destruction symbolised by an ox-yoke (meaning he advised submission) as opposed to Hananiah's stance who broke the yoke (defying Jeremiah) and assured the people that Babylon would collapse and be no threat (following the 'official' line). See also Mic 3:11.

[154] Mystical experiences could authenticate messages: Num 22: 31-35, 38.

[155] However the 'independent' prophets would have their own lineage, spirit from the lord democratised by a spreading outward of spiritual authority gifting words (and thereby authority) to others: see Joel 2:28 & Acts 2:1-21. See also I Cor 12:1-11 where there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit, and varieties of activities but the same God who activates them: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' – prophecy, its vocation and endeavour is one of the gifts given out, the implication being that it has a lineage, a genealogy of people who hold this office.

recipient to distinguish lies from truth by way of both message and behaviour[156]. More than any other criterion a prophet was deemed 'false' if he urged apostasy to Yahweh (Deut 13:1-5).

Certainly content of message was a good marker of truth, proving that the 'independents' by their messages were re-interpreting and thereby attempting to re-ignite the tradition of moral faith that was still extant in Israel and stemmed from the age of Moses. To be critical of the people and attempt to 'turn' them from their prevailing behaviour is the mark of a true prophet (Jer 23:22)[157]. Accurate foretelling was also a marker of veracity (Deut 18:21-22) however oracles of salvation were considered suspect for they preached easy outcomes[158] - this often occurred within the cultus where predictions of salvation would be in line with official attitudes. The 'independents' made no claims to clairvoyance by methods such as the 'Urim' and 'Thummim' (I Sam 14: 41; 28: 6-7; Deut 33:8) or the casting of lots, for divination was regarded by them as a pagan method of obtaining a divine ruling[159] and Jeremiah for one opposed these (Jer 27:9)[160]. Direct verbal communication with Yahweh was their sole stance and argument[161] and the independent prophets were rigorous in linking the 'externals' of religious practice with a right spiritual 'heart'; they were against empty show. They perceived spiritual significance within the material world and believed that man's place within this (Yahweh's arena) in terms of his presence and activity was to pursue religious and moral ideals. Good moral character was a marker of authenticity[162], prophetic authority rested on right moral discrimination, the compulsion to prophesy following hard upon indignation ('the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote'[163]) at what the prophets saw as the moral wrongs which surrounded them[164]. As Heaton comments[165], the inner core of prophetic consciousness is an intensified spiritual and moral awareness. The heightened sensitivity of the prophets was the spur for them to speak out, their messages relying on 'insightedness', the insightful critique of the present which seeks to raise consciousness

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[156] See also Ezekiel ch 13 for a condemnation of false prophets who see false visions and utter lying divination, misleading the people by prophesying 'peace' when there is no peace (cf Jer 6:14 & 23:16-17).
[157] Frye comments 'the prophet with the authentic message is the man with the unpopular message' in Northrop Frye. The Great Code: The Bible and Literature. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982. p126
[158] See I Kings 22:11-14; Mic 3:5; Jer 6:14; Jer 14:13-14; Jer 28:5-9; Ezek 13:15-16.
[159] See Isa 47:12-13ff for condemnation of 'enchantments' and 'sorceries', also 'consultations' and astrological predictions.
[160] See also Isa 3:1-3; Ezek 13:23; Zech 10: 2.
[161] For example, Isa 8:11; Ezek 1: 3; 8:1. Being in the 'council' of the Lord (*sodh*) betokens direct personal knowledge of Yahweh, and this is the ground of 'true' prophetic authority: Jer 23:18, 21, 22; Job 15:8; Ezek 13:9. cf Amos 3:7.
[162] Drunken behaviour & lying was denounced – Isa 28:7; Jer 23:14; also bribery – Mic 3:11.
[163] William Blake: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy' lines 9-10: prophetic indignation at moral injustices is God's indignation. Complete Poems (1977) p186
[164] See Jer 15:19 – if the prophets speak what is 'precious' in the eyes of Yahweh, then they are indeed his 'true' servants, and what is 'precious' in Yahweh's eyes is both justice and righteousness through the working of conscience and indignation.
[165] E W Heaton. The Old Testament Prophets. London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 1977. p44

and induce a change of orientation by the challenging of individual and corporate behaviour patterns[166]. Micaiah was deemed to be sincere because he prophesied against preconceived attitudes and braved the wrath of the King by claiming to speak on behalf of Yahweh[167]. The 'cry of dereliction' which accompanies such an activity confirms the depth of feeling with which the prophets engaged in their god-given task[168].

Being able to tell a true prophet from a false was crucial for the recipient because prophecy by its very nature claimed to provide an 'authentically new insight'[169] that resulted in a crucial discontinuity, even although such insight arose from within the continuous stream of inherited tradition, the nation's continuity in terms of its vision of itself. In this way, history and experience showed progression from the past yet the prophets were able to be 'insightful' about the underlying moral and spiritual conditions of the present which they could then elucidate to the people and prophesy warning, encouragement, condemnation etc. It was important that the people believed the right message and the right messenger.

In addition to the complexities which authoritative utterance provokes with respect to the individual's claim to the prophetic vocation[170], it is also difficult for us as readers to establish definitively the authority of the prophetic texts themselves. A great number of anonymous editors, interpreters and redactors over time have pruned, added to, and reorganised the material in these 'original' texts and what we have is an amalgam of many voices over a great period of time. It is difficult to establish what exactly the original 'preaching' of the prophets was; the only record we have for the transition from spoken to written word is attested to in passages such as Jeremiah 36[171], but this is no proof that what we have are the definitive words of Jeremiah himself – if indeed he existed as a real individual at all. The prophetic texts are complex and problematic and as modern readers we are forced to accept them for what they are – a composite mosaic of confusing, interlocking, anecdotal, historical, social, testimonial pieces of 'wisdom' literature that have intertextual links with each other whilst at the same time being 'stand alone' pieces separated from each other by their respective contexts[172] which describe and analyse specific time-periods and events.

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[166] The commission from Yahweh makes the prophets responsible for the spiritual condition of mankind.
[167] I Kings 22:13-14; Ch 22 generally.
[168] See Jeremiah 20:14-18; Job 3.
[169] See Heaton (1977) p40.
[170] See Hos 12:13 which tracks prophetic 'provenance' back to Moses which renders the current prophets part of a 'living' tradition: 'By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded'.
[171] Other prophets may well have had scribes like Baruch; see also Isa 8:16; 30:8.
[172] Context was often used in an attempt to 'place' the prophetic experience of dialogue within a concrete event and validate it, see Jer 42:7; Hag 1:1; Isa 6:1.

Failure/ineffectual in mission

The prophets were keenly aware that their missions from God were unlikely to succeed. The idea of failure[173] ('I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity' Isa 49:4) was in a sense, built-in to their vocation but despite this they believed that God's word had to be spoken ('yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God' Isa 49:4) for beyond them it had a life of its own that would accomplish much that they themselves could not see[174]. Even although one generation might ignore their words, the message itself could not fail for Yahweh would not fail his own purposes. The prophets' only personal responsibility was to see that Yahweh's words were handed-on[175], beyond that they had no power and no jurisdiction. Preservation of his message was paramount as the written word would go forward into the future, preserved and continuously relevant. It cannot be assumed that the words of the prophets were seen by themselves (and their redactors) to be addressed to only one set of people, one set of circumstances and one time only – the messages have a trans-historical quality and relevance that renders them fresh and vivid. This makes ongoing synchronic interpretations apposite to contemporary life[176]. Prophecies which were fulfilled within the prophets' lifetimes were recorded, as prophecies which concerned Israel would always have fresh meaning attached to them as events moved on. Such a perspective leads to a continual reinterpretation of tradition as new events dictate – which means in turn that history never fully dies but is of perennial relevance. The prophetic texts are not texts of failure, but rather are texts of the history of the present[177].

The prophets were aware of the likelihood of failure in their missions[178], but it is always emphasised that the people to whom the prophet speaks God's word have their own

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[173] An example of the immediate failure of prophetic message occurs in Jeremiah 36 where King Jehoiakim destroys Jeremiah's scroll. This apparent failure of mission was overturned by Jeremiah who was instructed by Yahweh to re-write the scroll; the incident is metaphoric of failure and its transcendence, the message renewed in hope. See also Ex 4:1; Jer 1:8; 5:20-21; 7:27; Ezek 2: 4-7; 3:7-11; Jer 44:4-6.

[174] See Isa 55: 10-11; also Zech 1:3-6 where the prophets' words will live on beyond their own life spans.

[175] Yahweh says to Ezekiel: 'You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house' (2:7). See also Isa 6:9-10.

[176] This means that the temporality of the reading process is paramount and takes precedence over other ways of interpreting the text, for 'meaning' does not only reside within authorial intention or located only within the text, 'meaning' is effected when the articulated thought of one person is heard/read by another – this process is part of the relationship between text and reader. What the text 'intends' can be different to what the author 'intends'. This shifts exegetical focus away from questions of authorship and onto the text itself and also onto the reading process. Sean McEvenue comments: 'As a literary work without an author, the Bible text in itself becomes an organic Word of God': Sean E McEvenue. 'The Old Testament, Scripture or Theology?'. Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology. Vol 35 No 3 (1981). Richmond, Virginia, USA: Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. 229-242. p237 Further: 'A published text becomes community property and may be given new meanings by the community as it is used in different contexts ... the new meanings will not be the meanings of the text but rather meanings of the community', *ibid* p238.

[177] Von Rad (1968) p27 explains how the Nathan prophecy (II Sam 7) is appropriated and re-used, vs 11-16 relating to David and his descendants; v13 connected by the Deuteronomists with Solomon's building of the temple; and Deutero-Isaiah re-applying the prophecy about David to Israel as a whole (Isa 55: 3ff). See also re-application of the prophecy in I Chron 17:11ff; the point being that an oracle first spoken in the long distant past continued to have a present relevance, and so the tradition mounted and grew.

[178] See Ezekiel 3:7 for a note on the 'hard forehead' and the 'stubborn heart' of Israel who will not listen to the prophet for they do not listen to Yahweh. The prophet is made hard in order to fulfil his task; his forehead 'like the hardest stone, harder than flint' in order that he can speak to those unwilling to listen, and not be dismayed (Ezek 3:8-9). See also Jer

responsibility for orientation either towards or away from Yahweh (Ezek 3:11)[179]. The prophets' only responsibility is to deliver the word which will, despite apparent failure of reception, 'stand forever' (Isa 40: 6-8)[180]. Isaiah further emphasises the effectiveness and ultimate longevity of Yahweh's word: 'so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (Isa 55:11)[181]. This underlines the fact that Yahweh's purpose will not fail to be fulfilled[182], and his word's ongoing regeneration is his own continuing power and strength among men and the deeds of men[183]. The word is described as being powerful and damaging[184], as well as restorative and redeeming. Yahweh's intervention in human history occurs on an ongoing basis, repeated for emphasis in Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21: 'his hand is stretched out still'. It could be said that there is no event which has not already been planned for[185]: 'before (new things) spring forth, I tell you of them' (Isa 42:9), and more concretely: 'I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfil my intention'' (Isa 46:8-11)[186]. The final goal of divine activity through the prophets and through Yahweh's interventions in Israel's history is that Yahweh will sanctify his own name[187] through his living word, and the nations finally come to know that he is the Lord (Ezek 36:22-23)[188].

Working in tandem with the word is the 'sign' or 'portent'[189] which the prophet embodies[190]. Yahweh acts through the instrument of his prophet giving symbolic instructions to his servants which must be enacted before the people, thus the prophet

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1:18 where Yahweh makes him 'a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall' against the whole land; they will fight against Jeremiah but they will not prevail.

[179] See Isa 6:9-10 where even during his commissioning vision Isaiah is warned that the people will always reject the word of the Lord, stop their ears and shut their eyes, so that they may not be 'turned' and healed.

[180] See Isa 42:18-20 for a view of the prophet as himself blind/deaf, who 'sees many things' yet 'does not observe them'; 'his ears are open, but he does not hear'. In this sense, the prophet personifies the people before God who are seen by Yahweh to be stubbornly deaf and dumb, refusing to see the truth of their lives and change.

[181] See also Psalm 147:15 & Isa 40:8: 'The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever'. See also Isa 45:22-23: 'from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear'.

[182] 'I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfil my intention'' Isa 46:9-10 & 46: 11.

[183] See Psalm 147:19 where Yahweh's statutes and ordinances are sent to Jacob by way of the word. cf Isa 9:8.

[184] See Amos 1:2 where the Lord 'roars' from Zion and has the power to wither the pastures and dry-up the top of Carmel; word as destructive force, voice of divine wrath: word described as being a weapon of war: 'a sharp sword', 'a polished arrow' (Isa 49:2) connoting the fact that it is put on earth to perform a deed of combat.

[185] See Isa 5:19 where the 'plan' of the Holy One is assumed to exist; also Isa 22:11; 37:26-27; more comprehensive pronouncement from Yahweh on the same theme: Isa 14:24-27.

[186] See also Isa 48:3-5; 46:8-10 & Ezek 12:25-28; Isa 5:19.

[187] 'For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another' (Isa 48:11).

[188] For Yahweh is 'the God of all flesh' (Jer 32:27) not just the Israelites.

[189] See Isa 20:1ff: 'Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so ...'. See also Jeremiah 13:1-11 for linen loincloth, and 13:12-14 for symbol of the wine jars. Cf also Ezekiel as sign: 12:6; 12.17ff; 4:4-8.

[190] See Ezek 4:4-8, 9-13; 12:6-7.

himself becomes the visual representation of the word of Yahweh[191]. The prophets were literally signs to their own times[192]. Being 'signs' often meant that the prophets both enacted and endured further suffering as they were literally the precursors enacting the suffering of the people that was to come. This idea of the 'suffering servant' links with the suffering of Jeremiah articulated in his 'confessions'[193]. Isaiah too was seen as a 'suffering servant' before God as well as an embodied symbolic enactment of the suffering of the people[194]. If the prophets were signs *to* the times they were also signs *of* the times. These they took to be moral rather than political, the powers which variously threatened Israel and Judah were merely the agents of Yahweh's judgement, but the cause of that judgement was the internal corruption of Israel's life. It was to the moral (interior) condition of the people that the prophets addressed themselves and addressed Yahweh's words[195].

Faithfulness and cost

There is personal cost involved in carrying out God's task faithfully. Jeremiah understands as he prays to Yahweh: 'I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation' (Jer 15:17). The prophet takes on the mantle of God's attitude to life and the people, seeing things through God's eyes and feeling as God feels. The prophet is more than just a 'mouth', is also God's representative presence on earth, and the indignation that Jeremiah feels is Yahweh's indignation. The prophet is not only privy to the purposes of Yahweh but has access to Yahweh's feelings of wrath, indignation, love, regret, sorrow, at the people's breaking of the covenant, and expresses them. Furthermore 'normal' life can be denied the prophet. The Lord tells Jeremiah: 'You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place' (16:2). Jeremiah's task and vocation as prophet, his faithfulness to Yahweh, mean that he will never be a husband or a father but must stand alone before the people, uttering the words of the Lord. This marginalises him and removes him from 'normal' life, a voice speaking from the displaced edge of society[196].

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[191] For other examples of symbolic enactment: 1 Kings 11:29ff; Isa 8:1-4; Jer 19:1ff, 27:2ff, 32:6ff; Ezek 4-5.
[192] See Ezek 12:4-7.
[193] See p48 below
[194] See Isaiah 52:13-53:12. He bears the infirmities and diseases of the people, afflicted and wounded for their transgressions; he 'bore the sin of many' yet was despised and rejected by the people even although before God he was 'The righteous one'. cf the idea the Yahweh too bears the sin of the people: 'I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save' (Isa 46:4).
[195] Polk notes that the importance of one's public life and the performance of a social 'role' or 'office' in the ancient world was more crucial than our modern idea of developing a personal identity and a private life. Individual destiny was subordinate to the fact that one had contributed to the public good. The prophetic books are a mix of typology and the 'personal', the latter only coming to the fore in Jeremiah's 'confessions' and Isaiah's 'servant songs', as well as being highlighted in the 'names' of the prophetic texts, however typology is wholly implied within prophetic vocation itself. Timothy Polk. The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984. p20
[196] Ezek 12: 3

The strains of the prophetic vocation find expression in the so-called 'confessions' of Jeremiah[197]. In the first he complains he is like a lamb led to the slaughter and he finds Yahweh to be a God who tries his heart and mind, yet despite this he has committed his cause to Yahweh. Jeremiah is faithful in spite of alienation and his crushing knowledge of the people's evil. In his second confession, he bewails the fact he was ever born as the reality of his vocation has rendered him 'a man of strife and contention to the whole land'. He suffers insult for being Yahweh's 'mouth' yet the latter's words are to Jeremiah the joy and delight of his heart[198]. Again Jeremiah reiterates the awful cost of faithfulness[199] – he sits alone, filled with Yahweh's indignation, and he finds his pain to be unceasing and his wound incurable. Jeremiah knows (in confession three) that he has not run away from being a shepherd in Yahweh's service, but he still prays for healing and prays to continue to receive the word in spite of travail. In confession four he feels that the people have dug a pit for his life, even although he stood before Yahweh and interceded on their behalf[200]. His anger lashes out at the people who have caused him so much pain and he prays that Yahweh will visit his retribution upon them. In the last confession Jeremiah attests to the power of the call which he experienced, the power of the Lord which he continues to experience, and testifies to the compulsion which grips him to speak Yahweh's word even although the reception of it is met with reproach and derision. Still he keeps his faith in the face of extremes and believes 'the Lord is with me like a dread warrior', his 'persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail'[201]. He retains his faith throughout his ordeal.

These 'confessions' or 'soliloquies' are a unique record of the personal experience of a prophet *qua* man[202] who wrestles with his vocation, his God, and his emotions due to the hardships and fear which he experiences[203] as he tries to maintain his faith and prosecute a mission among a people who are a danger to his life and who greet his words with derision,

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[197] See conf 1 - 11:18-12:6; conf 2 - 15:10-18; conf 3 - 17:14-18; conf 4 – 18:19-23; conf 5 - 20:7-18.

[198] Despite the negative effects of mission, the prophets felt the privilege of their vocations, Jeremiah: 'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart' (15:16); also Ezekiel who had to open his mouth and eat what the Lord gave him (2:8ff) and who found the scroll as 'sweet as honey' in his mouth (3:3). This points to experience of the word as alimentary and physically sustaining, providing a point of correlation to the references within the texts that man cannot live by bread alone (see Deut 8:3) and that spiritual food is the real sustenance – see Amos 8:11-12 for a reference to spiritual famine and thirst. cf: 'Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live' (Isa 55:2-3).

[199] See Jer 11:19; compare Isa 53:7.

[200] Jeremiah was arrested and imprisoned in the cistern, remaining in the court of the guard until the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 37:11-21 & 38:1-6ff). See also other references to Jeremiah's speaking out and becoming an object of abuse: 20:1-6; Ch 37 & 38.

[201] See the testimony of Baruch in Chs 37-45 which describe the events and dangers of Jeremiah's mission.

[202] Polk (1984) p8 makes a distinction between the historical Jeremiah and the Jeremiac persona in the text, and the concept of 'self' – he asserts that the prophetic 'persona' is a literary-theological construct (p10). Principal among the uses of 'I' and the assertion of self within Jeremiah is the expression of emotion (p24) which contains both interiority and particularity. For example in Jer 4:19ff, the lament works on various levels: as a construct of the text through use of particular form and language; the textual Jeremiah actualises the human capacity for grief by being an emotional 'self'; Jeremiah the prophet performs the grief on behalf of the people and himself, enacting his prophetic identity before Yahweh. See also Jer 8:18-21 where 'my/me' equates Jeremiah the prophet with the voice of Yahweh; 'we' identifies him with the people; and 'I' is the voice of grief from Jeremiah *qua* man.

[203] See Jer 37:15-16.

disdain and treachery[204]. This is the road to a personal despair[205] and darkness of mind and heart to which all prophets testify at some point and find difficult to overcome. Only access to knowledge of Yahweh's eternal and renewing acts of judgement and salvation and the promise that their words are not in vain[206], keeps the prophets true to their life task[207].

The so-called 'Servant Songs' in Deutero-Isaiah[208] testify to a similar experience to that of Jeremiah[209]. Isaiah is the Lord's servant, whom he upholds as his chosen, in whom his soul delights (42:1)[210]. Isaiah is directly inspired by Yahweh who says 'I have put my spirit upon him'. His task is to bring forth justice to the nations and his strength will come from the Lord. He is given as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, in order to open eyes that are blind (42:6-7) and Yahweh will tell him 'new things' before they spring forth. Isaiah was predestined to be chosen (49:1, 5) as Jeremiah was (1:5) and his mouth will be like a sharp sword; he is himself a sign: 'a polished arrow' (49:2) yet he feels the weight of failure: 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity' (49:4) yet his faith endures: 'surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God'. His mission is to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; it is a mission of restoration, reconstitution, realignment, redemption. He knows he is the tool in God's hand – 'The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward' (50:5). Yet he endures persecution: is struck, assaulted, insulted and spat at (50:6)[211]. His only recourse is to the Lord (50:7-9).

Isaiah is portrayed as a martyr figure, bearing infirmities and diseases on behalf of others, wounded for their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities (53:4-5). He made his life an offering for sin (53:10) yet it is out of the very darkness which he inhabits that he 'shall see light' (53:11). He will make many righteous by bearing their iniquities (53:11). These

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[204] See Jer 18:18.

[205] See Jer 45:1-5 where he may have his life as a 'prize of war' but has suffered to extremity and has 'no rest'. cf Hopkins' Dublin Sonnets including: 'No worst, there is none' Gardner (1967) p100; cf also Blake: 'To Tirzah' where personal anguish is expressed regarding limiting and barren mortality experienced through the 'dark glass' of our empiricism as compared with spiritual bliss and freedom, the raised 'spiritual body' Complete Poems (1977) p132.

[206] See Isa 59:21 that points to lasting spirit and prophetic lineage overturning the apparent failure of prophetic vocation.

[207] That of a man speaking to men – cf Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802): 'What is a Poet?': 'What is a poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind', viz the prophets who were endowed with such extraordinary sensibility. Romantic Poetry and Prose (1973) p601

[208] See Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; (poss 51: 9-16) 52:13-53:12.

[209] In the Songs the Servant is trustful and obedient, holds the office of a mediator, suffers not for his own sins but at the hand of God for the sins of others, God's agent for the world's salvation. The emphasis is not so much on the identity of the Servant as on his typological function within divine purpose; the Servant is often identified with Israel (Isa 49: 3).

[210] Israel too is Yahweh's 'servant': Isa 41:8-10; 44:1; 44:21-23; 45:4 offering a corollary to the prophetic vocation as servant - Yahweh has chosen both to be the instruments of his purpose. Yahweh also gives Israel as a 'light to the nations' (Isa 49:6). Israel's history is the key to all history: Isa 41:8-10; 43:10-12; 49:3. See also Ezek 20:41; 28:25; 36:23; 38:16; 39:27.

[211] See also 53:3 – 'a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity'.

martyr motifs show that one of the prophet's responsibilities was to be a paradigm of the people before God and by so being, he took the weight of their transgressions upon his own shoulders[212]: 'he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors' (53:12)[213]. Along with the rest of the prophets, Isaiah found that hardship, failure, isolation, persecution, martyrdom, walking in darkness, were all part and parcel of the prophetic vocation. Yet it is at the very moment of extreme darkness, the moment of dereliction and metaphysical death that creation can occur: in blindness the eye sees, in deafness the ear hears, in dumbness the word utters. The prophets lived within a veil of tears, walked a *via dolorosa*, knew what it meant to be *in extremis* in order to be an effective 'mouth' for the inspired word of God. It can be argued that, according to their testimony, it is the travail that causes the light (53:11), that it is the will of the Lord 'to crush ... with pain' (53:10). Through such suffering the prophet will be allotted a portion with the great and he will find satisfaction through his knowledge and make many righteous. Through these it is the will of the Lord which shall prosper (53:10).

Prophetic endeavour can be seen as being eschatological in scope because at the end it will be the will of the Lord that comes to fruition, and prophetic endeavour will be seen in light of this. Their efforts, whether ending in apparent failure or not, are an attempt to return the people to a correct alignment with their God, effected by removal of guilt and restoration of covenant. Prophetic work has significance beyond the man himself, the immediate moment, and points forward towards future possibility (see Isa 52:15) – it opens up spaces for change to come in at the right time. The servants of the Lord are not merely individuals standing in counterpoint to both Yahweh and the people but are also the bridging symbols between them, arcs of reorientation and bridges to restoration of faith[214]. The prophets symbolise old ways being present in the 'new' – the old traditions and laws revived and built upon, providing historical and religious continuity that becomes a legacy for the future to inherit[215]. The personal cost for the faithfulness of the prophets is seen by them as being *sub specie aeternitatis* and this enables them to bear the evil moment for a greater good.

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[212] The comparison with Christ is obvious. cf Ezekiel's physical suffering on behalf of Israel & Judah: Ezek 4:4-15.
[213] See also Ps 106:23; Ex 32:9-14; Deut 9:19.
[214] See Moses as provenance of mediation between Yahweh and Israel, complaining like Jeremiah and suffering on behalf of the people: Ex 4:10; 14:31; Num 12:7-8; 11:11-15; Deut 3:23-29; 4:21; 9:9, 18-20, 25-27. See also Deut 18:18 where Yahweh promises a new prophet, a new 'Moses' *ad infinitum* = repetition of 'type' – see also Isa 59:21 for reiteration of repetition of 'archetype'.
[215] See Isa 41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 18; 44:6-8; 45:21; 46:9-11; 48:3-6.

Revelation/Inspiration

The prophets' visions and inspirations come from outwith themselves, out of the blue and unsought[216]. One prophet (I Kings 13:20) receives the word of the Lord whilst sitting at the dinner table whereas Jeremiah has to wait 10 days before receiving the Lord's word (Jer 42:7)[217]. The Lord recruits Samuel whilst he is lying down in the temple (I Sam 3: 3ff). The prophets are addressed in words which they can hear clearly and which for them are a direct encounter with the living God[218]. This experience, which endowed them with authority and authenticated their mission enabled them to say to the people: 'Now therefore hear the word of the Lord' (7:16). Amos began to speak following direct inspiration from Yahweh[219]. The reception of revelation or inspired words causes physical trauma[220]. Isaiah is traumatised (21:3-4); Habakkuk hears and trembles (3:16).

Such profound personal experiences become the legitimisation of the prophet. Micaiah ben Imlah begins one of his prophecies by proclaiming the standard words: 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord' and proceeds to describe his vision which itself legitimises his utterance (I Kings 22:19ff). Isaiah too prefaces the words of the Lord with an account of his commissioning vision (Isa 6:1ff). Ezekiel's commissioning vision (Ezek 1-3) is also described prior to the Lord's command that he should go to the exiles, to his people, and speak to them. He is told to say: 'Thus says the Lord God'[221] whether they listen or not (Ezek 3:11). Vision and proclamation are indivisible and this accounts for the synaesthesia, vision experienced as words or words described as a visual event: 'The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw[222]'. Yahweh is also revealed to the prophets' hearing[223]. Deutero-Isaiah testifies: 'Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught' (Isa 50:4)[224]. Inspired revelation whether by words, vision, or hearing is experienced as being filled with the

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[216] See a characteristic experience of this in Ezekiel 8:1-4, also Isaiah 8:11ff.
[217] See also Jer 28:12.
[218] See Hosea 12:10 for Yahweh's own testimony of speaking to the prophets and through them bringing destruction.
[219] See also Isaiah 48:16 for spirit accompanying the prophet in his work.
[220] See Ezekiel 3:14-15; also Daniel 10:8 where his strength leaves him; cf Daniel 8:27; also Job 4:14; and Jer 4:19.
[221] This does not merely convey the expression of an idea or the passing-on of information, it was a declaration of the express will of God which was brought to fruition by its coming into the life of the world through his 'mouths', the spokesmen, his prophets. See Jer 23:29 about the force of Yahweh's words.
[222] See Daniel 10:1: 'He understood the word, having received understanding in the vision'. cf Isaiah: 'The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw' (2:1); 'The oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw' (13:1). 'A stern vision is told to me' (Isa 21:2).
[223] See Isa 5:9; 22:14; Ezek 9:1, 5; 10:5; cf also Job 4:12ff.
[224] cf Paradise Lost (1971) VII 26-30: 'On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues;/In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,/And solitude; yet not alone, while thou/Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn/Purples the east'. See also IX 20-24: 'If answerable style I can obtain/Of my celestial patroness, who deigns/Her nightly visitation unimplored,/And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires/Easy my unpremeditated verse'.

living spirit of the Lord, and this is both the prophets' personal encounter with a higher power and the basis of their authority to speak[225].

Sight/visionary experience - defamiliarisation

Prophetic vision is initially bound up with the prophet's call and commissioning (*q.v.*) but thereafter his inspired visions are often in dialogue form whereby Yahweh gifts the vision and then proceeds to explain exactly what it is the prophet sees. By doing this Yahweh is explaining the 'internal' meaning of the vision which lies beyond and behind the presentation of the actual artefact or scene itself. The vision then becomes a 're-presentation', metaphoric or metonymic of something else - usually a moral state or choice or the presence of spirit unseen. The prophet's main task is to see and understand; vision comes before words and vision requires a capacity for insight with regard to a thing's internal meaning or intrinsic quality which is then passed on to the people by way of oracle[226]. The oracle itself is often metaphoric[227], a visual parable or simile is used to convey a moral idea[228]. In this way words and image work together to provide a bridge between God and the prophet, the prophet and the people, with the sole aim of gifting enlightenment.

Isaiah's sight and his efforts to hand-on that sight, from which emanate the visionary experience of defamiliarisation, are bound up with vivid visual description to which the similes testify[229]. Such worded vision has its roots in Genesis[230] where Adam saw the animals before he named them, underlining the importance of the fact that anything seen does not truly exist until it is named, for only then do seen things become real and accessible to our understanding. Empirical observation in order to comprehend can only exist through sight first then language following[231]. Even Yahweh's act of creation is

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[225] See Micah's testimony 3:8: 'I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin'. This is devolved authority from Yahweh who has delegated power in order that he can progress his will and plan for mankind.

[226] See Num 24:2-4 where one who hears the words of Yahweh has 'clear' eyes. See also Elijah's conversation with God who is in the 'still small voice': I Kings 19:11-14. See Job 4:12-17 where he attempts to understand exactly what the mysterious communion with God is: a word; thoughts from visions; dread; the feel of a spirit gliding across his face; seeing a form but not discerning its appearance; a voice in the silence.

[227] See the many references in Isaiah to the contrast between a peopled place rich in flora and fauna (Isa 25:6; 27:2-3; 35:1, 6-9) and visual imagery of barrenness/wilderness in nature: (Isa 17:1-2; 18:5-6; 19:5-10; 13:21-22; 14:23; 34:13-15); the moral inference being that what Yahweh creates he can also destroy, giving both plenty and want.

[228] For example the idea of 'measuring' is conveyed by the ancient method using 'line' and 'plummet' (Isa 34:11, 28:17) – usually referring to the measurement of men's 'hearts' with respect to the practice of justice and righteousness.

[229] See Isa 1:8; 7:4; 18:4; 29:8, 11f; 30:13, 17; 31.4

[230] See Genesis 2:18-23: '... the Lord God ... brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name'.

[231] Walter Ong comments that names give human beings power over what they name: 'without learning a vast store of names, one is simply powerless to understand' Walter J Ong. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word. Ed. Terence Hawkes. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1982. p33

bound up with naming, see Psalm 147:4 and 33: 6, 9. Yahweh's word is a component part of his creative activity, he creates by naming[232].

The prophets' worded visions[233] are an attempt to raise the consciousness of the people in order that they choose right orientation of life towards Yahweh, and not orientate themselves towards deceit, idol worship, hypocrisy of religious practice, exploitation, greed etc. Examples of worded vision can be found in Amos: his visions of the locusts, the shower of fire, the wall and the plumb-line (7:1-9), also the basket of fruit in 8:1ff[234]. The Lord shows Amos a vision then proceeds to interpret it so that Amos will understand the message he is to convey to the people. Similarly in Jeremiah, the 'word' of the Lord comes to him asking him what he *sees* as Yahweh shows him the branch of an almond tree. The interpretative metaphoric implications of sowing, growth, flowering and fruition as well as beauty are obvious when connected with the propagation of the word, but in spite of this the point at issue is lexical whereby there is paronomasia on the Hebrew words 'shaqed' meaning the tree branch, and 'shoqed' meaning 'watching', which denote the Lord 'watching' over his living word to 'perform it' (Jer 1:11-12). This vision attempts to show Jeremiah that Yahweh tends his own word as a good gardener does his plants, and that under his hand his word grows. Yahweh commandeers the eyes as well as the lips of his prophets who can do nothing and say nothing without seeing the world through God's eyes. However Yahweh's servants are also deaf and blind, they see but do not observe, their ears are open but do not hear (Isa 42:18-20). This emphasises the servants' limitations (who are paradigmatic of the limitations of humanity as a whole), who can only see through a glass darkly, and who can only see as the Lord gives them power. Yahweh has to explain himself to his prophets for on their own they are not capable of grasping his whole mind and intention.

Even although Yahweh directs his prophets' sight, none of them can testify to what God looks like[235]. They focus on God's judgement and saving acts within their own time and within history thereby rendering Yahweh a god of action rather than personality, his character known by what he does and what he stands for. This quality of action rather than personality, of deed rather than self, is mirrored by the prophets who were primarily men of action in the world, their selves subsumed in their vocations, their individuality made paradigmatic in order to provide for the wellbeing of the collective. Yahweh injects his

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[232] See Isa 40:26 'He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name'; see also Isa 48:13.
[233] A Graeme Auld comments that the regular Hebrew word for 'seeing' (r'h) is often used in the Bible of special, enhanced, second sight. JSOT 27 (1983) p10
[234] See also 9:1-4.
[235] See Amos 7:7; 9:1; and Isa 6:1.

word into history through the prophets, often in a destructive manner. He says to Jeremiah: 'I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them' (5:14). He reiterates this with variation: 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?' (23:29). His worded power is wrathful and poured out against the collective's whole way of life, in the social and economic spheres where injustices abound, within political alignment and religious practices.

Language gives the world around us both definition and material expression; through words objects are given form and are catalogued, the act of 'naming' providing distinct identity. The word as vessel for sight can contain more than sight is capable of seeing, words having connotations and denotations, alliterative and assonantal qualities, symbolic and mythical correlations, all of which provide depth beneath surface appearance. The word not only expresses comprehension of the world but also expresses the relationships between things. The range of nuance within words can provide access to a spiritual reality that remains elusive and unseen. Sight and language working together as creative forces can continually 'fruit' new things or intensify things already in existence. Words have power, for the sheer act of 'naming' something contains an essence of what it, in itself, is. The matrix of human comprehension comprises a unique and interlocking mixture of worded vision which makes our world comprehensible in so far as it is possible for us to comprehend, limited as we are by our five (or possibly six) senses. It is entirely possible for things to exist outwith our empirical experience because we do not possess the apparatus with which to identify them. It is our minds which fill the gap between our objective reality and the words we use to label it – the mind as bridge. We bring our own horizon of expectation to the act of seeing and wording: our intelligence, prior experience, comprehension, and collective unconscious knowledge and understanding – all of which can allow deeper meanings and deeper levels of perceiving to surface and interplay with our more objective apparatus. We come to no sight cleanly and it is the task of wordsmiths and inspired visionaries to try and 'stain our water clear' by giving us a rejuvenated world to look at, word, and understand. There is an art of persuasion involved in such a task of prophetic defamiliarisation in order that we see afresh.

Language of rhetoric[236]/poetry of persuasion

The prophetic mode of speech in the Hebrew Bible is poetic[237] in that it is speech characterised by rhythm and parallelism[238], the logic of the latter being the tenet 'how

[236] Ong points out that rhetoric was at root the art of public speaking, of oral address, for persuasion or exposition. The Greek *rhetor* is from the same root as the Latin *orator* and means 'public speaker'. Ong (1982) p109

much more so' in that it comprises a graduated intensification. Prophetic speech is also poetic in that its aurality (and orality) accesses much of poetry's tools[239] - simile[240], metaphor[241], repetition[242], assonance, dissonance, rhyme, alliteration, riddle, allegory[243], and is often pithy and compressed with moral ideas expressed in poetically visual ways that access contemporary artefacts, practices, and ways of life. This works especially with the parable form, for example Ezek 15:1-8 with the 'therefore' *volta* and the following syntactical logic 'like', 'so'; similarly the riddle of the two eagles and the vine (Ezek 17:1-10)[244]. Matthew Arnold believed that right understanding of the Bible required a perception of its poetics: 'To understand that the language of the Bible is fluid, passing, and literary, not rigid, fixed, and scientific, is the first step towards a right understanding'[245]. This poetic fluidity shows itself through the different modes of discourse which are woven into biblical text - there are prose passages where the prophets are not themselves speakers[246] and many passages where Yahweh himself speaks[247] and there are passages where a narrator narrates events surrounding the prophet and his mission[248]. There are also the voices of the prophets' disciples whose interests were to record the prophets' oracles for posterity which meant that the prophetic tradition changed

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[237] Robert Carroll comments: 'There can be no disagreement that individuals such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel were poets. The speakers of the oracles in the anthologies we call 'prophetic' literature were clearly poets', JSOT 27 (1983) p26; cf Robert Alter: 'As soon as we perceive that a verbal sequence has a sustained rhythm, that it is formally structured according to a continuously operating principle of organization, we know that we are in the presence of poetry and we respond to it accordingly' (quoting Barbara Herrnstein Smith. Poetic Closure. Chicago, 1968) Robert Alter. The Art of Biblical Poetry. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1985. p6; similarly Lowth: 'A poem is called in Hebrew *Mizmor*, that is ... a short composition cut and divided into distinct parts. It is thus called in reference to the verse and numbers. Again, a poem is called, in reference to the diction and sentiments, *Mashal*; which I take to be the word properly expressive of the poetical style. Many translators render it by the word parable' Lowth (1847) p49

[238] Characterised by Lowth, Oxford Professor of Poetry, who argued in 1740's that the organisational principle of Hebrew poetry was a feature called 'parallelism' which rendered it poetic – one verse line echoes another in two or three-line stanzas providing poetic outcomes: repetition, intensification, contrast, juxtaposition, emphasis etc. Fisch (1990) p137 comments: 'Parallelism is not merely the rhyming or echoing of the same idea but involves intensification, a mounting passion, as the idea or perception is carried forward incrementally'

[239] 'A distinctly poetic style predominates in Jeremiah: staccato exclamations, rapid changes of scene and vantage point, frequent shifts of voice and discourse, use of invocation, plural command, and rhetorical question, a propensity for assonance and wordplay, a rich array of metaphors and similes from the natural landscape and from human crafts and trades, and precision of metonymy and synecdoche' Joel Rosenberg on Jeremiah and Ezekiel Literary Guide (1997) p185

[240] See Jer 8:6; Isa 1:8, 1:18, 30-31.

[241] See Isa 1:8; 7:4; 18:4; 29:8; 30:13, 17; 31:4 for representative similes/metaphors. See an effective extended metaphor in Isa 5: 1-7; the house of Israel and the people of Judah are described as 'his pleasant planting' and this visual metaphor is referenced extensively, enlarged and progressed within the prophetic texts; q.v. Isa 28:23-29 & Jer 32:41. Also repeated references to the people as 'ore' that requires 'refining'; Jer 9:7 & 6:29-30; Isa 1:22, 25 & Isa 48:10.

[242] See Isa 9:12-10:4 for refrain 'his hand is stretched out still', linking the sense as well as delineating the separate passages. See also Jer 8:1 for repetition of 'bones' for emphasis. For a longer lyrical passage with linking repetitive phrasing see Isa 2:9-21, the first refrain vv 9, 11, 17; the second refrain vv 10, 19, 21.

[243] 'O Mortal, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the house of Israel' (Ezek 17:2).

[244] See also the allegorical 'lamentations' over King Zedekiah: Ezek 19:1-9, 10-14. Biblical language uses visual metaphorical tropes that portray material reality used as 'vehicles' for carrying a 'tenor' of moral quality or didactic lesson. cf Jeremiah whose actual physical suffering (Jer 4:19) is the external 'vehicle' for the interior 'tenor' of his anguish. See also the 'cup of the wine of wrath' (Jer 25:15-16). Compare this with G M Hopkins' physical suffering as an expression of interior metaphysical agony.

[245] Matthew Arnold. Literature and Dogma. London: Watts & Co, 1910. p12

[246] For autobiographical passages see: Amos 7; Hos 3; Isa 6; Isa 50:4ff.

[247] An example of this is Ezek 5:13-17.

[248] See I Kings 17:1-7, 8-16 & 17-24 for accounts of prophetic acts. See I Kings 21: 17ff for accounts of prophetic words, also II Kings 1:3f. Compare the temple speech of Jeremiah in 609 BC (7:1-15) and the story describing the same incident in 26:1ff. See also II Kings 6:1-7 for a third-person report.

from stories about the prophet to the actual collection and transmission of his words, thereby storing his voice for the future to hear[249].

The Hebrew Bible makes the transition from orality to literacy[250] through what may have been an attempt to record and preserve the nation's history, but within the prophetic texts it is a variety of voices which have been recorded and not merely the law and the deeds of officials and kings. The texts are also a mosaic of many tropes: staccato exclamations, changes of scene or vantage point - for example the visual polarity often used to emphasis the powerlessness of the people as opposed to the exalted glory of the Lord in Isa 5:14-16 where the people are brought 'low', are 'humbled' and go down to 'Sheol' as compared with the 'exaltation' of the Lord's justice[251]; there are shifts of voice and discourse, commands, invocations, doxologies, prayers and praise, rhetorical questions, polemics against foreign nations, paronomasia, metonymy[252] and synecdoche[253]. Because of this variety there is a large degree of ambiguity in the writing, but such polysemousness does not lead to obscurity, rather it allows a multiplicity of inter-related 'meanings' to bear fruit. This technique of multi-layering provides an interwoven textual coherence and internal strength and can deepen the reader's understanding.

The prophetic texts are a collage of testimony from many different voices which commingle and cross each other to such an extent that it is often difficult to pull the threads of sense apart and clearly identify each speaker. The 'mouth' of Yahweh can mean Yahweh's own mouth as well as relating to the function of the prophet himself. Point of view can determine interpretation. For example there is a difference in vantage point between the picture of Isaiah given in the stories about him (Isaiah 36-39) and that conveyed by his own oracles. We 'see' the texts through many eyes, 'hear' it through many voices. The language of the prophets is concentrated and specifically designed to ensure

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[249] See Isa 8:16-18; 30:8 and Jer 36 (his scribe Baruch) for indications as to how the messages were written down and handed on.

[250] '... the deadness of the text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers' Ong (1982) p81

[251] cf elsewhere for similar polarities: Isa 13:10; Isa 14:9-11 & 12-19; Isa 40: 6-8; Amos 5:7-8 & 9:2-3; Isa 55:9 & 57:15

[252] See 'Jacob' used as metonym for the people of Israel: Jer 30:7ff.

[253] The human 'heart' is often used (see Jer 4:14; 5:23-24; 17:1, 9; 12:2) to represent the shape and direction of a person's life – his character, emotions, will and intellect, as well as his ability to empathise with others. This is synecdoche, the use of the heart to represent the whole moral person. The 'eyes', 'ears' and 'heart' are used frequently as faculties of moral sensibility. cf the many references to 'circumcision' (Jer 9:25-26 & 4:4), meaning the need for self-examination and a change of heart and mind, reorientation towards right action, not hypocrisy of (empty) physical deed. cf also the synecdoche of the 'tent' (Jer 4:20; Isa 54:2-3) which was a shrine, the predecessor of the Temple seen as variously, metaphor for the Exodus; individual family; the community; the public temple, the theological heart of Yahweh; the centre of worship in Jerusalem (Isa 33:20); and the return of the exiles to Zion.

that the people understand ('see') what they say[254], yet the oracles have a self-protective quality as they resist definitive interpretation, rendering them a lasting evocation rather than an immediately-decipherable shallow perception. Prophetic utterance is complex and interwoven, visual metaphor being the main device of explanation rather like the parable form[255] but this can be interpreted in many ways, rendering the oracle lively, elusive and ultimately indefinable.

The overriding intent of the texts is that of rhetorical persuasion[256]. There are many passages where the logic trail is delineated with 'as ... so' constructions (Jer 2:26), of 'if ... then' (Jer 4:1-2; 17:24-25; Isa 58:9-10) and 'therefore ... because' (Jer 8:10) constructions, whereby choice is linked with responsibility and consequence, and the rhetoric of persuasion works to identify exactly why God is angry and why retribution is inevitable. These rhetorical syntactical devices serve to explain why some behaviour is not acceptable to Yahweh, and serve to point towards correct behaviour, to the realignment of choice so that it correlates with what walking with God really means - righteousness of life and humanity to one's fellow man[257]. Prophetic rhetoric attempts to preserve the family life of God's people, its aim is to persuade that inhuman cruelty is a religious offence, effectively religious apostasy, and that what Yahweh expects of those truly devoted and obedient to him is being good to one another, the community of God known by the reverence and affection[258] its members hold for each other[259]. The prophets attempt to persuade that to 'know' God is to behave in a certain way with others[260], that 'knowing' is furthermore an expression of God through action[261]. The moral didacticism of the prophets is indissolubly linked with behaviour. Worship is a crucial factor, but it should be an outward and visible

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[254] And this is required because 'They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand' (Isa 44:18).

[255] See Isa 28: 23-29; also Isa 5:1-7.

[256] The poetic and aesthetic cast of the texts work to service the religious viewpoint, and the texts make claims to truth regarding history, the prophets, the world, the behaviour of the populace and their rulers, and the nature of God. The poetic language imaginatively 're-presents' the contemporary Hebrew world to our eyes and in general is 'performative' – a language of action, for action is theologically paradigmatic. See Sean McEvenue's comment: 'Scripture is not a source for answers to current questions. Rather, one listens to Scripture on its own terms, as a discipline towards intellectual, moral, and religious conversion' Interpretation 35 (1981) p240.

[257] See Jer 29:5-7 where he advises the exiles in Babylon to settle down, exhorting that they pay attention to communal welfare for in it the individual's welfare resides – he exhorts mutual obligation, co-operation and responsibility, the moral tenets that prevail if one is truly walking with God. cf Jer 7:22-23 where Yahweh wants no empty offerings and sacrifices but rather, wants the people to obey his covenant and 'walk' with him accordingly. cf: ' I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go' Isa 48:17.

[258] See Heaton (1977) p66.

[259] This was based on a traditional belief in family and tribal solidarity – the understanding that the integrity, freedom and responsibility of the individual must exist within a social framework – that man is man within a wider matrix of social arrangements – father, husband, brother, son, and this related to the concept of 'nation' as it did to the concept of 'family'.

[260] Lowth comments: 'The religion of the Hebrews embraced a very extensive circle of divine and human economy. It not only included all that regarded the worship of God; it extended even to the regulation of the commonwealth, the ratification of the laws, the forms and administration of justice, and nearly all the relations of civil and domestic life. With them almost every point of conduct was connected, either directly or indirectly, with their religion' Lowth (1847) p91

[261] See Jeremiah's comments on King Josiah's (640-609) behaviour, in contrast with his son Jehoiakim (609-598): Jer 22:13-17: 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me?'.

sign of inward spiritual communion with Yahweh, not a 'show' of belief only, empty observances[262]. Rhetoric was aimed at showing Yahweh's requirement for an outward manifestation of inward belief and this demanded personal orientation[263] within a spiritual geography towards the positive and life-enhancing rather than the negative and life-denying. The prophets' indignation and hatred of sacrificial worship was based on its paganised and empty heart[264].

The rhetoric of the prophetic texts can be broken down into various 'types' of utterance. The 'messenger formula' is a common device used in all of the prophetic texts. It was common custom in the ancient world for a messenger to arrive at court with an announcement, speaking in the first person, someone else's words[265]. This submerges the ego of the individual to become a 'mouthpiece' for another: 'Thus says ...' is a common feature[266]. The prophets believed themselves to be ambassadors of Yahweh, the messengers of the Lord, thus they used this device repeatedly[267]. However they prefixed this formula with another type of utterance, the 'divine threat' following prefixed by a 'diatribe'[268], or the 'promise' following prefixed by an 'exhortation'. Both could be linked with the *volta* 'therefore' which formed a connection between the two. The 'messenger formula' along with its prefixed clause means that the literary category of prophetic 'oracle' is fulfilled, this formula incorporating the human prefix and the divine word of Yahweh, the human words leading up to and introducing the divine, the divine words often closing: 'Thus hath Yahweh spoken'. This was an attempt to link a trans-historical *diachronic* value with a specific *synchronic* human need or situation which gave Yahweh's words a definite human referent and context, the divine word emanating from the realm of the eternal to human time by way of the medium (or channel) of a single human mouth[269].

The prophets also appropriated other extant modes of discourse in order to frame their message and make it more interesting and accessible to the hearers. They accessed various *fora* where specific subject matter and language normally resided like that of the cult sanctuaries or the court of law (trial speeches)[270], as well as using didactic language[271],

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[262] See Jer 12:2; Isa 29:13 for recognition of this failing.
[263] Orientation through the metaphysical geography of morality; steering correctly through life.
[264] See Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-24; Hos 5:6; Isa 1:10-17; Mic 6:6-8; Jer 6:19-21; 7:21-28; Isa 66:1-4 for expressions of this.
[265] See Jer 51:31 for a description of this fact.
[266] See I Kings 2:30; Isaiah 37:3f.
[267] See Amos 3:9-11 for 'diatribe' and 'threat'; Isaiah 8: 9-15 for 'exhortation' and 'promise'.
[268] See Isa 10:5-19 for a 'diatribe' and 'threat' example, the *volta* occurring at v16: 'Therefore ...'.
[269] Language is vital to the concept of 'self' as it exercises and develops one's capacities for emotion, rational thought, action, empathy, understanding – all of which give the self definition and substance in the wider world. The prophets used the medium and capacity of poetic, rhetorical language to articulate moral ideas which had their substance in action.
[270] See 'law suit' speeches, with introduction, interrogation, charge, verdict and sentence: Jer 2: 4-13; Mic 6: 1-8; Isa 58: 1-14. Judgement oracle (Mic 3:9-12): summons to the accused: 'Hear this'; indictment: 'you .. who abhor justice'; connecting link with divine judgement: 'therefore/because'; sentence: 'Zion shall be plowed ..'.

proverbial sayings[272], or popular songs and dirges[273]. As with poetry, form cannot be separated from content and where the verse structures begin and end can affect their sense. It is often difficult to tell different sections apart, and this makes exegesis complicated with no definitive interpretation possible. Choice of form depended upon the content which the prophet wished to communicate. Wide-ranging use of different modes of discourse was an innovative move on the part of the prophets which meant that they crossed the whole of their society's language usage, manipulating and drawing on different sections or strata of experience as best fitted their intent. Their message went beyond, and very often criticised, the constrictions and limitations of society's institutions and the language they appropriated and used to different ends reflected this.

These principles of construction are widespread within the prophetic texts, with catchwords which provide 'hooks' for the progression of sense and provide internal cohesion to the arguments[274]. Jeremiah's language (also Isaiah's) however, uses less of the traditional 'messenger' formulae and strikes out into the unusual territory of personal lyrical complaints before God. All of the rhetorical didacticism of the prophetic texts voices the belief that action leads to consequence - for example in Isa 3:8 Jerusalem has 'stumbled' and Judah 'fallen' because of their actions. It is only when Yahweh's 'judgements are in the earth', that 'the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness' (Isa 26:9). All of the tropes discussed are used for emphatic effect, the more visually striking, the more cleverly constructed, the better, for the arguments retain attention through their vitality, their diversity, yet their interwoven coherence.

Witnesses to time (historical *chronos*) / witnesses to humanity (ahistorical *kairos*)

Through the messages[275] of the prophetic texts we have a record of deeds and encounters between nations and individuals. The messages the texts preserve still accompany Israel through its own history, which is why much of Jewish thought and practice still revolves around significant events like the Exodus, the parting of the Red Sea, and specific

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[271] See Job 12: 7-10 where he attempts to teach that the spirit in nature is from God. cf Isa 1: 2-3; Jer 8: 7; Jer 5: 20-29 where the natural behaviour within nature is contrasted with the human being who is far from his natural behaviour because busily perverting and distorting what should be natural to him = deliberate orientation against the self; cf Hopkins' ideas of *affective* and *elective* will, and 'selving'; also Blake's understanding of the natural self being imprisoned and distorted from without.

[272] See Hos 4: 11, 14.

[273] An example of cultic reference is Isa 1:16; court of law language Isa 1: 18-20 or Jer 2: 9ff; the language of a teacher of wisdom Isa 28:23; popular song Isa 5: 1ff; dirges Isa 23: 1ff, Ezek 19: 1ff.

[274] See Isa 5: 8-25 for repetition of 'Ah, you' and 'Therefore' which help progress the sense and hold the passage together; also the repetition of 'on that day' Isa 17:4-11.

[275] The 'meaning' of the messages arises through the symbiotic relationship between writer (text) and reader - words have meaning across time because re-interpreted afresh with fresh eyes, maintaining their 'value' in a trans-historic sense despite being the product of a specific voice in a specific time. Reader interpretation colludes with the production of meaning, keeping the text valid and alive - its 'value' does not disappear just because the original creator and context have disappeared. Through the experience of text the reader is transformed as s/he brings subjectivity to the text's framework birthing a new and unique experience. As Ong says: 'Writing is consciousness-raising' Ong (1982) pp178-9

references to significant individuals like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob are accessed as touchstones to the present. The prophets are witnesses to certain actual periods in time, as their historical contexts show, but they are also witnesses to the deeds of humanity on a generic level and the choices that human beings make, and in this latter sense, provide ahistorical witness to human behaviour which can be accessed and analysed today with respect to our own corporate and personal choices.

Conclusion

The Prophets of the Hebrew Bible spoke a social and political message to their own societies and times, of man's struggle for good and right, honour and love of fellow man and God, and the struggle against evil in its many forms: greed, oppression, lies, cruelty, exploitation, misuse of power etc[276]. The import of that message has a relevance that goes beyond any contemporary context and conditions of its birth, because the prophets perceived the struggle against evil as an ongoing task. Through time, new mouths in the prophetic lineage would arise to carry their predecessors' spiritual and moral torches, to speak an ancient message to new times and new ears, to counteract in all ways possible the new evils that were the old ones, for their own particular age. They all asserted that religion should not merely be a specialised and confined, essentially empty enactment that is relegated to one particular observance in the week, but rather that it should reflect the quality and attitude of man's quotidian deeds, is in essence a way of living that is delineated by an ongoing orientation of spirit towards the one living God that is Yahweh.

The prophets' own imaginative leap of faith perceived a lineage of prophets arising as the times required them[277], a voice in every age speaking condemnation, challenge and warning[278]. They perceived such a lineage gifted with inspired insight, foresight, and a sharpness for discerning the evils of each age, to speak out against the roads we travel unthinkingly[279]. It is possible for collective society now as then, to discern a true didactic message (voice) from a false, and to determine within the human cycles of birth and death the clash between good and evil that still exists in the singular, personal moments of each day. Blake perceived the reality of such a clash, believing that there is always a moment in

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[276] Burnaby holds that 'But since the righteousness of God is more than a principle governing the relations of events, since it is the character of a Person, it could only be fully revealed in a Person, entering as persons enter into the historical scene, but representing in Himself the essentially divine activity, *doing* what God and only God can do'. John Burnaby. Is The Bible Inspired?. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1949. p104

[277] Frye (1982) p129 comments: 'The prophet's present moment is an alienated prodigal son, a moment that has broken away from its own identity in the past but may return to that identity in the future'

[278] See I Corin 12:1-11 for a description of the dissemination of a variety of spiritual 'gifts', one of them being prophecy.

[279] See I Corin 12:12-31 for the growing of man into a true spiritual body and the responsibility of the various 'parts' to the 'whole'.

each day that Satan cannot find[280]. The prophets spoke to the individual choices in life both for and against many things, which choices they perceived to be the driving forces of progress or otherwise which affect the formation and maintenance of our societies[281].

The formation of a fixed biblical canon has ensured that prophetic utterance remains preserved within text. It exists today within the voices of these texts which still act as tracts of instruction and enlightenment[282]. This thesis proposes that where the wordsmiths are in a given society there the prophets are[283], telling us with new mouths appropriate to new times and new circumstances, old truths[284]. Although the biblical canon is formally seen as 'closed', it is proposed that the chain of prophecy – as attested to by the prophetic texts themselves - is not[285]. Poets arise in every age to add their voices to the ones that preceded them, the canon of literature alive and unfinished.

There are links between prophetic message and history, just as there are links between prophetic message and contemporary context - one does not invalidate the other, indeed the power of the message, its inspired spirituality, is enhanced by access to both. The poets discussed in the following three chapters: R S Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and William Blake speak out with inspired voices against their contemporary contexts, called to choose stances and vocations which effectively marginalise them and displace them into 'wilderness' situations where they speak from the edge of man to the heart of man. Their personal pilgrimages within society on behalf of the collective come at personal cost. They warn against the evils they perceive, and point to their perception of essence of spirit

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[280] cf Blake: 'There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find/Nor his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent & has many Angles/But he who finds it will find Outhoons palace, for within/Opening into Beulah every angle is a lovely heaven' Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 37 [41] lines 15-18; also 'By Satans Watch-fiends tho' they search numbering every grain/Of sand on Earth every night, they never find this Gate./It is the Gate of Los' Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 35 [39] lines 1-3 Complete Poems (1977) pp705 & 701

[281] cf Scott (1969) p13: 'Time, as man knows it, has two aspects: it goes on, passing in ceaseless movement; the generations rise and pass away. But some present moments stand out from all the others. The hour strikes; the moment of decision and supreme experience comes. In that moment there is something more than one drop of time glimpsed as time's stream passes over the brink of the waterfall. It can be a great moment, charged with eternal issues determining destiny. There and then the Eternal stands revealed, claiming and challenging. The prophet, not the priest or the teacher, is the voice of God in that moment. He is the spokesman who can articulate the meaning of an eternal order and a Divine reality. He discloses the moral crisis in which men stand unheeding. He declares which is the way of life and which the way of death, and calls for decision'.

[282] cf Scott (1969) p14: 'They [the prophets] do not speak of our age but to it, because our age also is critical and the issues at stake are spiritual and moral. If we can see beyond the local and temporal setting of their Word as spoken to men of that ancient world, we shall find that it is spoken to us too'.

[283] Frye (1982) p128 agrees: 'The sources of the prophetic element in modern society ... may come through the printing press, more particularly from writers who arouse social resentment and resistance because they speak with an authority that society is reluctant to recognize. Such authority ... is certainly not infallible, but it may be genuine insight nonetheless. Tolerance for creative minds as potentially prophetic ... seems to be a mark of the most mature societies'

[284] As Otwell comments: 'We do not turn to the past for solutions to modern problems. We turn to the past for renewal'. John H Otwell. A New Approach to the Old Testament. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1967. p129 However finding renewal *is* finding solutions to modern problems – discontinuity into continuity.

[285] Burnaby (1949) p83: 'Here, then, is inspiration. But when we call such men inspired, it is clear that we do so not merely in virtue of the vision which they have seen, but because they have had the power to communicate the vision – because they have been able not only to enter themselves into the eternal regions of the Spirit further than the common man, but also to give such expression to that experience that we common men are enabled ... to share it'.

within materiality, showing us the things that they love. They witness, they persuade, they hand-on to us their visionary experience of the world, within their inspired utterance they reveal their faithfulness, their pain, their feeling of human frailty and failure. They believe in their own poetic authority and its testament to God despite being surrounded by 'secular' societies that are driven by needs and imperatives that differ markedly from their own. Critical, they call us away from our contemporary 'idols' and try to orientate us towards spirit, towards a perception of its underlying and underpinning reality which is often obscured. Rhetorical and didactic in these tasks, their prophetic poetry of social protest is compelling in its appeal for our attention and our realignment.

Inspiration by outside agency is the ancient force that links prophets[286] and poets, a force claimed by the ancient Greeks[287] as the 'Muse'[288], and by the Hebrew prophets as the Holy Spirit, and carried forward to our own time through a chain of poetic and prophetic voices attesting to its. For the purposes of this thesis the forces of both 'inspiration' and 'prophecy' exist (and may indeed be synonymous) and in succeeding chapters this discussion will analyse the various ways in which the work of three poets from three different ages of a non-Theistic world[289] seem to mirror and embody various aspects, characteristics and qualities of Hebrew Bible prophecy.

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[286] '... because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (II Peter 1:21).

[287] Burnaby (1949) p46: '... in pagan religion generally the belief is common that certain individuals may from time to time be so invaded and possessed by an invisible power that what they do or say under its influence expresses *not* their own thoughts or desires, but those of the unseen being whose organ or instrument they have become', further (*ibid* p50): 'The idea of possession by an invisible power was as natural to Hebrew thought as it was to primitive and pagan religion generally'.

[288] 'In early Greek poetry one finds the belief in a link between the divine Muses and the human poet. The Muses have seen and know all things and give poets the power to portray them. Hesiod regards himself as called by the Muses, who breathe into him a divine voice. Pindar uses the term *prophetes* to denote the link. The poet is a chosen herald of wise sayings, lauding virtues and instructing in them. The Muses play the mantic role and poets the prophetic role. The poet offers himself as a *prophetes* who can mediate divine knowledge. He has a divinely imparted genius that equips him for the task'. Geoffrey W Bromiley. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eds. Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich. Tr. G W Bromiley. Michegan, USA: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985. p954

[289] Altizer comments: 'Full modernity has known our apocalyptic ending as the death of God' Thomas J J Altizer. The Contemporary Jesus. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997. p13

Chapter Three

Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Thou mastering me God!'.

> ... the youth shut up from
> The lustful joy. shall forget to generate. & create an amorous image
> In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow.
> Are not these the places of religion? the rewards of continence?
> The self enjoyings of self denial? Why dost thou seek religion?
> Is it because acts are not lovely, that thou seekest solitude,
> Where the horrible darkness is impressed with reflections of desire.[1]

I

Hopkins is in many respects a marginalised figure who speaks with the authority of 'fundamental truth' - the Catholic Church. He is a member of an institution which is definite in its absolute and infallible revelation of God; Hopkins is a prophetic paradigm within this *milieu* experiencing the stresses and torments which his vocation engenders, elucidating these within a poetics of mastery and revelation. God is experienced as both a *via negativa* and a *via positiva*, unavoidable and necessary yet inaccessible. Within a nineteenth-century of agnosticism and the *Deus Absconditus*, Hopkins' personal knowledge of God *in extremis* renders his vocation Jeremiac in its complexity, and passionate in its pursuit of an impossible idealism. Hopkins is martyr-like in his self-abnegation, a prophet of the unknown God whose acts of poetic creation instantiate both sacrifice and praise, the centrality of the daily Sacraments the hub from which all things radiate.

In personal terms Hopkins' Catholic conversion[2] initiated a sharp division from his prior life and an existential rending as he was torn from family, his native English culture; and whilst he was a dogmatic Catholic believing that people were literally damned if they were not members of the True Church, he was at the same time hostile to politics in Ireland and the move towards Home Rule which the Jesuits supported. He was displaced from a cultured upper-middle-class background and faced with the reality of conditions in industrial cities - as parish priest he was not merely a visitor but lived alongside his parishioners, the slum-dwelling Irish. Hopkins is in many ways a post-Romantic as well as

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[1] Blake: Visions of The Daughers of Albion Plate 7 lines 5-11 Complete Poems (1977) p205
[2] Hopkins' conversion occurred in October of 1866 when he was aged 22, following a period of spiritual stress; Cardinal Newman assisting him in making his choice, advising him to finish his studies at Oxford.

a Victorian, interested in Ruskin, architecture and the detail of nature, tutored by Pater within an Oxford classical environment, yet his life choices made him a marginalised and lonely figure, nomadic[3], and in spiritual terms even at odds with his fellows, more inclined towards Scotus[4] than Aquinas, the incarnational concepts of 'selving', 'inscape' and 'instress' (from Scotus[5]) being the root stock of his redemptive vision.

Scotus' vision arose out of a conflict between philosophical 'schools' in the last thirty years of the 13th century: the Augustinian and the Aristotelian. The Augustinian school believed that the first and proper object of the human intellect is God; attention should be paid to what is eternal, infinite, absolute – and this is man's divine vocation. The Aristotelian-Thomist doctrine held that the proper object of the human intellect is the *quiddity* of a material thing, ie: the natural object of our knowledge is *essence abstracted from matter*, based on daily human experience. This meant that knowledge has *sensation* as its necessary starting-point. Duns Scotus was dissatisfied with either of these positions, believing that man is not born perfect and not in possession, from the first moment of his existence, of all the acts of which he is capable. This renders man a matrix of potentialities, which are developed gradually as he comes into contact with reality - a law of gradual development to which the soul is subject as well as the body. Scotus affirmed that: 'the primary and adequate object of the human intellect is neither immaterial being, God, nor material being, nor the *quiddítas rei materialis*, but *being* simply and without any qualification'[6], ie: being *qua* being (Hopkins' idea of 'selving' as expressed by 'The Windhover' and 'Henry Purcell'). This means that whatever is, by the very fact that it is, is intelligible.

The problem for the Augustinian school was how man, from the concept of God, can *descend* to the concept of creatures without passing through an intuiting of divine essence. For the Aristotelian-Thomists, a way was needed to show how man can *ascend* from the concept of creatures to the concept of God. Scotus believed that for every power there corresponded an object: that it is only through the union of power and object that acts ensue. It is no great leap from this position to Hopkins' position: he wanted to 'complete

[3] Hopkins comments in a letter to Bridges: XLIII written July 13, 1878 from 111 Mount Street: 'permanence with us is ginger-bread permanence; cobweb, soapsud, and frost-feather permanence' Abbott (1935) p55
[4] John Duns Scotus born Scotland 1265/66, exact date unknown, ordained to the Priesthood March 17, 1291 aged 25. Nomadic, was in Paris 1294-1297 and Cologne 1308. Died Nov 8, 1308 aged 42/43. Process of beatification began 1706.
[5] Hopkins comments: 'After all I can, at all events a little, read Duns Scotus and I care for him more even than Aristotle and more *pace tua* than a dozen Hegels' Letter to Robert Bridges from St Beuno's College, St Asaph, North Wales, February 20th 1875: Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Ed. W H Gardner. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1963. p176-7
[6] Efrem Bettoni. Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy. Tr & Ed. Bernardine Bonansea. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961. p31

the dear O where it failed' – join the *seer* and the *seen* to connect the Yahwistic current in a completed circle where the fiery energy of God flowed unimpeded and brought man to God. Scotus and Hopkins perceived that man can arrive at the concept of God solely through the study and knowledge of creatures - which are the objects that directly stimulate our intellect and emotions through sensible experience[7].

For Scotus, material beings were composed of both matter and form – matter cannot exist without form, and no matter is possible without a particular form: whatever exists is necessarily individual. Scotus was engaged with the idea of *discordia concors/concordia discors*[8] where things are singular but not exclusively so: certain aspects of things make them distinct from all other things and so unique, yet there are aspects that make them similar to many other things with which they share a unity of genus and species[9]. This is the theory of the *natura communis* or the physical universal – a thing is not only a composite of matter and form but, more importantly, a composite of a specific common nature and at the same time a principle which contracts nature into singularity. This is Scotus' theory of *haecceity* or 'thisness'[10]. The *natura communis* can be perceived as the diachronic umbrella of connection, the *haecceity* a synchronic individuation[11]. Hopkins adopted these ideas, expressing them with 'inscape' (referring to exterior material form or composition: *forma mixtionis*) and 'instress' (referring to the upholding life-force or essence within: *forma vitae*) and his emphasis on 'dappling' where the connection and distinction is made between the generic and the unique in a poem like 'Pied Beauty'.

Central to Hopkins' poetics is the call to praise and making 'see', to lead man to God through a renewed appreciation of the exterior and interior beauty of matter, his prophetic aim the restoration of perception through intensity of experience[12]. His technique, sprung rhythm, provides constancy within differentiation, an underlying heartbeat beneath syllabic inconstancy that provides stability within instability, just as his vision of the world and God perceives synchronic individuation within diachronic time. His poetics posit the fundamental: 'you are what you do': one 'selves' through behaviour, choice, control, moral

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[7] Hopkins commented that: 'What you look hard at seems to look hard at you' Journal entry 1871: Humphry House. Ed. (completed by Graham Storey). The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins. London: Oxford University Press, 1959. p204

[8] See also Chapter 5 p211.

[9] Hopkins was very interested in this idea. In an essay written for the Master of Balliol in 1864 'On the Signs of Health and Decay in the Arts' he commented: '... deliberate beauty ... (that is, the beauty of finite things) if the principle is ... comparison, the enforcement of likeness and unlikeness, the establishment of relation, then it is plain that in some cases likeness may be enforced between things unduly differing, contrast made between things unduly near' House (1959) p75

[10] Bettoni (1961) p60

[11] Bettoni (1961) p58

[12] According to Donald Davie, this makes Hopkins a 'decadent' poet – his controlled and muscular (masculine) poetic continually striving for mastery over language, is infused with (feminine) intensity and emotion: essay 'Hopkins as a Decadent Critic' in Donald Davie. Purity of Diction in English Verse. London: Chatto & Windus, 1952. p171

will. It is 'active being' that is essential, the correctly-directed 'elective' will (*voluntas ut arbitrium*). This is his prophetic sacramentalism, as he endeavours to ensure that we see through his eyes (in order to look at ourselves) to analyse whether or not we take on the mantle of what Hopkins called the 'doing-agree': active outward participation in a directed life[13]. Individuality, for Scotus, is the ultimate perfection of things – in this sense in a Christian *milieu* Christ is paradigmatic: the act of existing, of being who you properly are, holds the greatest moral richness and beauty. Therefore Hopkins' primary focus is a prophetic critique of human nature and behaviour, the act of the individual[14]:

> … corruption was the world's first woe.
> What need I strain my heart beyond my ken?
> O but I bear my burning witness though
> Against the wild and wanton work of men[15].

II

Hopkins' critical function analyses 'the stretching compass round'[16] - all things of earth and people[17] - in order to provide compass marks for 'orienteering' within a complex world. He asks us this question: 'Where lies your landmark, seamark, or soul's star?'[18] and he does so for the reason that 'Man lives that list, that leaning in the will[19]/No wisdom can forecast by gauge or guess,/The selfless self of self, most strange, most still,/Fast furled and all foredrawn to No or Yes'. It is behaviour that is important not lip-service and Hopkins believes we are our choices, we can choose the 'doing-agree' that has the power to redeem us: just as nature renews, we too can be 'Amongst come-back-again things, things with a revival,/things with a recovery'[20]. It is possible to be redeemed by doing differently and in that new doing we become new people. He is concerned with our ability to be self-analytical and more able to choose correct 'roads'[21] to travel that comprise our

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[13] Hopkins comments: 'For there must be something which shall be truly the creature's in the work of corresponding with grace: this is the *arbitrium*, the verdict on God's side, the saying Yes, the 'doing-agree'' Christopher Devlin SJ. Ed. The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins. London: Oxford University Press, 1959. p154

[14] Scotus emphasises that 'while the consciousness of the act belongs to the intellect, dominion over the act, and hence its responsibility (*imputabilitas*) belongs to the will' Bettoni (1961) p166

[15] 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People' (1886) G M Hopkins. The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. 4th edn. Eds. W H Gardner & N H Mackenzie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967. No 157 p196 (hereinafter cited as Gardner, and unless otherwise stated, all poetry is quoted from this edition)

[16] 'The Escorial' No 1 p3.

[17] Like the world that was 'Shewn to Ezekiel's open'd sight' whose 'ken through amber of dark eyes/Went forth to compass mysteries', see 'Il Mystico' No 77, p111, lines 48-52ff.

[18] 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People' No 157, p196.

[19] cf 'I must hunt down the prize/Where my heart lists' No 88 p128 with its denotation of 'list' being 'falling to the side', 'heeling over', also the boundary of a tilting ground bringing in the idea of combat. It also means 'to please, to have pleasure in'.

[20] 'St Winefred's Well' No 152 p193, a tragedy on St Winefred.

[21] See Jeremiah 6:16 with reference to orientation and choice: 'Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls'.

unique way of 'going'[22]. Vendler asserts that Hopkins deliberately strained his art to represent the exigency of choice[23]. Hopkins' critical function is based on a reaction against what is, in order to plead for what should be, his poetic 'text of discontent'[24] founded in Jesuit, Scholastic and Catholic assumptions which comprise a highly moral spirituality.

'A Soliloquy of One of the Spies left in the Wilderness'[25] discriminates between two 'types' of person – the one who would eschew the hard choice taken in freedom, 'the waking trumpet, the long law', for a life of ease in captivity. But the result of this is made clear: the people who choose this are 'The gross flock'[26], the ones who want the flesh-pots, who sit unshod because they 'go' no further and would rather have their fill of meat than bear offerings (right deeds) to their god. They fear no iron rod because they have chosen not to heed it. They may have elected physical ease ('Here are sweet messes[27] without price or worth,/And never thirst or dearth') but such a choice has spiritual repercussions in that their souls can only sicken and die in an arena that is surface luxury but underlying poison. Their choice results in loss of a refined moral status and Hopkins makes his distinction between the 'brute' beauty of (instinctive) nature as expressed for example by 'The Sea and the Skylark'[28], and the potential[29] for 'moral' beauty in man as expressed by 'Tom's Garland'[30]. He critiques a society that makes animals of men by not allowing them decency by earning a sufficient living (how can men make right moral choices if they are busy surviving). Choice is the luxury of the rich and Hopkins denounces the fact that people do not have that luxury, who only 'lustily' their 'low lot feel', lowered to a non-intellectual level that lacks sensitivity and sensibility. Hopkins blames the 'Commonweal'

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[22] See 'Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice' No 49 p84: 'Both thought and thew now bolder/And told by Nature: Tower;/Head, heart, hand, heel, and shoulder/That beat and breathe in power-/This pride of prime's enjoyment/Take as for tool, not toy meant/And hold at Christ's employment' – Hopkins believed that all of man, his 'head, heart, hand, heel [way of going] and shoulder' [effort] should all be at Christ's behest.

[23] Helen Vendler. The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995. p39

[24] See No 125 p166: 'Fragments of Castara Victrix'.

[25] No 5 p14

[26] cf 'You rank and reeking things,/Scoop you from teeming filth some sickly hovel,/And there for ever grovel/'Mid fever'd fumes and slime and caked clot' 'Il Mystico' No 77 p111. Also: 'What would befal the godless flock/Appear'd not for the present' No 92 p130

[27] There is a connotation here of 'Mass' & 'mess-meal', also the refinement of Mass contrasted with a 'mess' of food and drink that leads people to gluttony and sin. The 'sweet messes without price or worth' do carry a price: losing one's soul.

[28] No 35 p68: the noise and energy of the sea and tides and the song and energy of the lark shame us, for in their natural selving that is 'too old to end' (because ancient yet always renewed) they counteract our 'sordid turbid time' through exhibiting a natural acting-out of the law of their beings. We by comparison, although being 'life's pride and cared-for crown' are impure because we are not natural - we make willed decisions that can undermine us spiritually.

[29] 'Our make and making break, are breaking, down/To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime' – this is in contrast to God's making, whose work does not decay, is active and purposeful.

[30] No 70 p103

that does not ensure the same level of life for all, for not all have basic 'bread' in order to live, this experience rendering them 'Undenizened'[31].

This image of the morally reprehensible man is contrasted by 'Harry Ploughman'[32] (Tom, Dick and Harry representing everyman), where 'beauty' is a moral doing. Harry may have a 'Churlsgrace', a comment on his social status, but he is nonetheless a 'child of Amansstrength' with the fiery energy of God flowing through him. His exterior beauty mirrors his interior 'moral' beauty whereby he 'selves' by doing, and Hopkins' admiration for his strength and fluidity plied to his task by will and duty, is overt. 'Felix Randal'[33] is given similar treatment, his 'mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome' becomes small and weak through illness but his life of action is extolled. Hopkins' critical moral eye approves of hard work, of bright 'doing' with the being and body God gives[34]. The simplicity of the portraits denotes that one does not have to be intellectual to act out the right and true law of one's being, but it is what we do and the way that we do it that counts, the 'fallenness' of man can and must be fought, 'Ah Nature, framed in fault'[35], nature is bad, base, and blind, and man can be 'brute' nature too but has the choice not to be: 'Dearly thou canst be kind'. There is comfort in this latter realisation; man can be the 'salt' of the earth that seasons it for the better.

The bugler boy's 'fall'[36] which Hopkins sees as inevitable and turns away from, is construed as a descent into 'brute' nature, is a morally empty 'fall'[37]. With 'Tom's Garland' man is already brutish, only interested in primal needs, the opposite of moral nobility in action which aims upward towards the perfection that is Christ. Thus, the 'Bugler Boy' and 'Tom's Garland' are posited in opposition to 'Felix Randal' and 'Harry Ploughman' where (in the latter poems) exterior beauty reflects interior moral beauty: 'good' enacted because of correctly directed energy and will. Hopkins perceives this as a Christ-like activity. Christ is present in 'ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely

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[31] cf Hopkins' comments in a sermon for Sunday evening Jan 11, 1880 at St Francis Xavier's, Liverpool: 'The aim of every commonwealth is the wellbeing, the welfare of all and this welfare of all is secured by a duty binding all ... How bright a thing then is good government and loyal submission, how bright a thing a wellordered commonwealth, where all the citizens, every least member of the state, is glorified by one equal justice! every man a just man, an honest man, an honourable man! for just means honest and honest means deserving honour' Devlin (1959) pp56-57

[32] No 71 p104

[33] No 53 p86

[34] Hopkins comments: 'It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty' Devlin (1959) p240

[35] 'Brothers' No 54 p87

[36] 'The Bugler's First Communion' No 48 p82

[37] See 'The Windhover' No 36 p69 for a comparison between the 'brute' beauty - the instinctive nature of the bird acting out the natural laws of its being, the poem glorifying the active principle of the fiery energy of Yahweh - and the 'moral' beauty of humanity which has potential to be, depending upon our choices.

in eyes not his/To the Father through the features of men's faces'[38]. This point is underlined in 'The Handsome Heart'[39]: the boy is young, his physical beauty reflective of inner moral beauty, his heart filled with grace which at this stage in his life is still wild and true to self, orientated towards home. All Hopkins can do is pray that on the path of his life, as boy-turned-man, interior moral beauty will uphold him, and that this will prevail over the 'strain' he will face 'in the roads'[40].

Being human involves conflict, for as Blake perceived, without contraries there is no progression. There exist opposing forces in life which require discrimination, correction, choice and applied will. The Hebrew word for 'repentance' also means 'turning' – a turning towards something as well as a turning away from something else. Hopkins' poetry as a poetic of conflict[41] is based upon this vision of opposing forces and he perceives these as ideas of beauty: 'brute' and 'Christological', God's 'better beauty' being not that of exterior form but interior 'grace'[42]. Hopkins elaborates on this in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'[43] where images of polarity show the problems of situating experience within one or another camp, illustrating that life is not so easily judged or quantified. His poetic of conflict is based upon what lies beneath externals and the struggle to maintain these in the face of mankind's leaning towards baseness.

Hopkins believes that it is by going and doing that we 'selve', or become who we are, but as we are forever changing, the process of 'selving' is a continuous one which requires to be continually addressed and adjusted. Hopkins explores this process in 'Duns Scotus's Oxford' and 'Henry Purcell'[44]. He sees that Duns Scotus' actions in life made him what he was: a 'rarest-veined unraveller', a philosopher who was deeply influential on Hopkins with his 'insight' into *haecceitas* or 'this-ness', his idea of 'selfhood' being the key to a universal ethic of being. Each individual is unique in his 'going', and Hopkins makes this

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[38] 'As kingfishers catch fire' No 57 p90
[39] No 47 p81
[40] cf s35 of 'The Wreck'. See a similar sentiment in 'The Bugler's First Communion': 'Frowning and forefending angel-warder/Squander the hell-rook ranks sally to molest him;/March, kind comrade, abreast him;/Dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order' – Hopkins praying that God will protect the boy when evil 'sallies' to molest. He hopes that 'freshyouth fretted in a bloomfall all portending' will be sustainable during the boy's life.
[41] cf his comment: 'I wear-/y of idle a being but by where wars are rife' No 66 p101: 'To seem the stranger'.
[42] cf 'there's an interest and sweet soul in beauty/Which makes us eye-attentive to the eye/That has it' No 125 p166: 'Fragments of Castara Victrix' and further, cf 'To what serves Mortal Beauty?' No 62 p98: mortal (exterior) beauty is dangerous for it sets the blood dancing and we ought, rather, to love 'love's worthiest … men's selves', for it is the self within that can be revealed by frame and face. Thus when one meets beauty one should ignore it as a dangerous distraction and look rather inward at the 'Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift', the 'sweet soul' that is God's better beauty, grace. Hopkins comments in a letter to Bridges: letter LXIV 22 Oct, 1879 from Bedford Leigh: 'I think then no one can admire beauty of the body more than I do, and it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous. Then comes the beauty of the mind, such as genius, and this is greater than the beauty of the body and not to call dangerous. And more beautiful than the beauty of the mind is beauty of character, the 'handsome heart'' Abbott (1935) p95
[43] No 61 p97
[44] Both written Oxford, March/April 1879.

point clearly in 'Henry Purcell': 'I'll/Have an eye to the sakes of him, quaint moonmarks, to his pelted plumage under/Wings' – using the image of distinctive markings on a bird's wings to emphasise the unique cast of a man of genius whose 'selving' through expression of gift left behind beautiful music. Thus: 'Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:/Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;/Selves – goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,/Crying What I do is me: for that I came'[45]. This is an expression of Scotist principles – 'the ontological significance of natural, individual and characteristic activity'[46]. However, later in Dublin when Hopkins was 41, he wrote 'I wake and feel'[47] which cries out against the strength of the 'self' which Hopkins cannot escape, 'this keen self-feeling'[48]. Here he expresses the idea of imprisonment within a mortal, physical body: 'I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree/Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;/Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse./Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours'. Hopkins cannot be anything but himself, called to be fully himself in suffering, forced to be a 'sweating self' which he cannot escape, his self 'taste' so strong that he is debilitated and undermined by it and is unable, literally, to 'taste' anything else[49].

'The Windhover' is an evocation of the selving of Christ by way of individual human beings: the 'just' man enacting 'justice' becomes Christ for he 'Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is-/Christ'. This means that Christ's character and message live on within living individuals: 'in ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his'. Compare 'Margaret Clitheroe'[50] who had a Christ-like beauty of mind and features that seemed to represent Christ-like qualities. He lives on in Margaret because of her deed of martyrdom and because of her moral will which was 'bent at God'. Hopkins extrapolates this for the rest of us, that we are Christ's mirrors who take on his likeness[51] by striving to be better human beings through our consciously-willed deeds. 'Barnfloor and Winepress'[52] illustrates this point of view and again choice is emphasised: you either starve on 'sin's wages' – which buy you nothing but sickness within plenty – or you take joy in the harvest of yourself to God which may involve both pain and sacrifice[53]. Christ was harvested for us and we in turn are harvested by God: 'is the shipwrack then a

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[45] 'As kingfishers catch fire' No 57 p90
[46] Bettoni (1961) p281
[47] No 67 p101
[48] No 152 p187: 'St Winefred's Well' line 63.
[49] Hopkins comments: 'When I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man ... Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own ... searching nature I taste *self* but at one tankard, that of my own being' Devlin (1959) p123
[50] No 145 p181
[51] No 151 p186
[52] No 6 p16
[53] 'Sheaved in cruel bands, bruised sore,/Scourged upon the threshing-floor'.

harvest,/does tempest carry the grain for thee?'[54]. Our blood is 'grafted on' to Christ's wood for we too are the living bread broken for the life of the world. Hopkins focusses on his central sacramental theme of sacrifice and praise by emphasising the contraries of life which require discrimination, and re-orientation.

Hopkins' critique of humanity, his point of view, is founded on the belief that man is split into two 'ranks' – those who willingly orientate themselves towards God, and those who refuse. His poetic of conflict attempts to re-orientate us towards God by witnessing to the presence of God as 'instress' or spirit infusing and enlivening the material world. 'God's Grandeur'[55] begins with a forceful statement of 'witness', that the world is 'charged'[56] (energised like an electrical current) with God's energy[57] as an ever-replenishing vein in nature[58], there to be seen and experienced if one chooses to look[59]. The poem expresses Hopkins' knowledge that in opposition to this point of view there are those in the world who do not believe in God[60] and who cannot see into the things of the world as being the measure of God's active presence. Hopkins is criticising this lack of perception which separates man from nature and by extension from God[61]. His faith sustains him: although man's apostasy results in spiritual darkness, the morning 'springs' eternal, and even in an age of agnosticism the Holy Ghost hovers protectively over the world. Thus nature cannot die despite man's destructive acts, and God cannot die despite man's unbelief, and the life of man cannot die despite his propensity for self-enslavement and his spiritual death -

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[54] See 'The Wreck' No 28 p61 stanza 31

[55] Written at St Beuno's, North Wales, February 1877, the first of 10 sonnets of 'praise', witness, exhortation, and discussion. No 31 p66

[56] Hopkins comments: 'All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him' Devlin (1959) p195

[57] This is a regenerative principle: 'Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on': 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' No 72 p105, and man within nature is her 'bounest, dearest ... her clearest-selved spark' passed from generation to generation and never dies even although: 'how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!' - human life ephemeral yet bright while it lasts. In contrast to this the cosmos is eternal and overbending: 'her earliest stars, earlstars, stars principal, overbend us,/Fire-featuring heaven' 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' No 61 p97; cf 'Sundry Fragments and Images' (xxvii) p139: 'A star most spiritual, principal, preeminent/Of all the golden press': the heavens being the place where Deity resides and eternity turns.

[58] cf 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' No 73 p106: 'Yet God (that hews mountain and continent,/Earth, all, out; who, with *trickling increment,/Veins* violets and tall trees *makes more and more*)' [my emphasis]; Hopkins may have taken this 'ever-replenishing' idea from Heraclitus: Fragment XXXVII states: 'The ordering (kosmos), the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures going out' Charles H Kahn. The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. p45. The didactic central theme of Heraclitus affirms unity, Kahn commenting that the final intent of his composition is *Len panta einai* - 'all things are one'. Kahn (1979) p7

[59] See also Heraclitus: Fragment XVI: 'Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language' Kahn (1979) p35

[60] 'that heeds but hides, bodes but abides' cf 'The Wreck' No 28 p62 stanza 32

[61] See 'Binsey Poplars' No 43 p78 for similar moral message: 'O if we but knew what we do/When we delve or hew - /Hack and rack the growing green!' Hopkins was keenly aware of man's lack of love and respect for nature ('Our make and making break, are breaking, down/To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime' No 35 p68 'The Sea and the Skylark'). We steal from the future: 'After-comers cannot guess the beauty been', and we destroy: 'even where we mean/To mend her we end her'. Hopkins feels responsible: 'What would the world be, once bereft/Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,/O let them be left, wildness and wet' 'Inversnaid' No 56 p89. Compare Auden's comment in August 1952: 'A small grove massacred to the last ash,/An oak with heart-rot, give away the show:/This great society is going smash;/They cannot fool us with how fast they go,/How much they cost each other and the gods!/A culture is no better than its woods' – 'Bucolics' II Woods: W H Auden. Selected Poems. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1979. p206; cf Hopkins: 'Duns Scotus's Oxford' No 44 p79.

because deep within all things exists the upholding, ever-replenishing creative energy of God[62]. Hopkins' critique of an age that has seen the death of God results in a plea for insightedness that can enable us to 're-see' the world we inhabit through belief in God as active principle[63].

Hopkins' critique of humanity continues with 'The Loss of the Eurydice'[64]. The captain chooses to go down with the ship, representing the heroism Hopkins lauds[65]. His idealism shows that even those who normally swerve duty can be full of heroism and rise to an occasion[66]. Here is moral high ground, like the nun in 'The Wreck' towering above everyone in the tumult (stanza 17). Both characters do their duty with courage and determination in the face of disaster and impending death: 'Ah! there was a heart right!/There was single eye!'[67], making them Christ-like in their martyrdom. Hopkins' prophetic task in persuading others to analyse their actions is both moral and spiritual, in that it involves critique of character. He exhorts us to 'Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire/Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:/You there are master, do your own desire;/What hinders?'[68]. This is an expression of wish that we 'come home to ourselves', that we stop looking outward at the world, and start looking inward[69] at the way

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[62] cf 'Spring' No 33 p67: 'Nothing is so beautiful as Spring ... A strain of earth's sweet being in the beginning/In Eden garden' – an Edenic/Adamic vision. Hopkins tries to enliven jaded minds to help see the world anew. 'Ribblesdale' No 58 p90 captures wonder towards nature: 'Earth, sweet earth, sweet landscape, with leaves throng/And touched low grass, heaven that dost appeal' – and posits man as damaging: 'the heir/To his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn,/To thriftless reave both our rich round world bare/And none reck of world after' – yet it is paradoxically within the destroyer that 'Earth's eye, tongue, or heart' are located, thus the redemption of the earth can only come after man's redemption.

[63] Working against this active principle of God is the evil which assails: the 'roar' of 'A wilder beast from West ... more/Rife in her wrongs, more lawless, and more lewd' 'Andromeda' No 50 p84. Active against 'Andromeda' (the Church of Christ) on the rude rock of Protestant England is the assault of evil - the Church is 'dragon food' and 'devil's prey' to the new powers of the Antichrist: rationalism, Darwinianism, industrialisation, paganism etc; Christ having conquered sin and death comes in a *Dies Irae* to redeem his Church and destroy his enemies. Gardner (1967) p277. Hopkins sees an ongoing 'war' in progress and he pleads for individual action.

[64] No 41 p72

[65] cf 'The Soldier' No 63 p99 – the calling to be a soldier is 'manly' and the reference to Christ having known war and served his time as soldier identifies the ideal temporal King with the eternal, spiritual King Christ, and is an exhortation to fight for Christ. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola emphasised that faith involved fighting, that believers should be soldiers of Christ, heroic and chivalric, as Ignatius himself was. Cf also the chivalric ethic inherent within 'The Windhover'; cf No 156 p195: 'What shall I do for the land that bred me' - 'Immortal beauty is death with duty'.

[66] Gardner (1967) p271: in a letter of May 30, 1878, Hopkins said: 'I believed Hare to be a brave and conscientious man: what I say is that even those who seem unconscientious will act the right part at a great push'.

[67] cf 'The Wreck' s29. See also Matthew 6:22: 'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness'. Hopkins sees the heart and soul having 'eyes': 'The heart's eye grieves'; 'earnest eye'; in 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People' No 157 p196: 'His looks, the soul's own letters, see beyond,/Gaze on, and fall directly forth on life'.

[68] cf 'The Candle Indoors' No 46 p81. The message is: attend to your own 'doings' first and not your neighbours': cf Luke 6:37-42: 'Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye'. The idea of 'salt' and 'saltiness' is also here: cf Matthew 5:13-16: 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?'. Salt gives taste, one's presence on the earth makes the earth 'taste' differently – Hopkins emphasises that presence matters, deeds make a difference – 'The Candle Indoors' symbolic of life force, light given out to others: 'God to aggrandise, God to glorify'.

[69] cf Thomas: 'The best journey to make/is inward. It is the interior/that calls': 'Groping' from Frequencies (1978); cf also Blake: Los's vocation is also to shine light into dark places, to expose, reveal and clarify: 'His head beamd light & in his vigorous voice was prophecy' Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the First Page 9 line 26. It is in this way, carrying a solar disc, that Los enters the Door of Death for Albions sake inspired, to search out the 'tempters' in the 'interiors of Albions Bosom' and so confront the 'solitude and dark despair' of humanity. See **Frontispiece** 'Los As he enterd the Door of

we live, the values we live by, the choices we make, the beliefs we have. In 'close heart's vault' lie the emotions and the will, and Hopkins wants us to direct ourselves to good moral and spiritual acts[70]. We can be masters of ourselves if we choose to be, keep the 'affective will' (*voluntas ut natura*) in check by our 'elective will', and not allow our 'animal' selves to take over our rational and moral selves which can serve a higher ideal. Thus: 'There is your world within./There rid the dragons, root out there the sin./Your will is law in that small commonweal'[71]. The 'small commonweal' of the individual is a component part of the larger commonweal of country and state[72], just as man makes up the members of the body of Christ[73] with Christ as head[74]. Hopkins directs us to be responsible 'members' of the body politic, the community, for in and by our relationships with one another does the larger whole exist, and in and by our moral 'goodness' does the moral health of the larger whole reside[75].

Hopkins claims that a life should be a mastered thing, that it should be deliberately crafted, not left alone to grow rank and heedless: 'Boughs being pruned, birds preened, show more fair;/To grace them spires are shaped with corner squinches;/Enriched posts are chamfer'd; everywhere/He heightens worth who guardedly diminishes;/Diamonds are better cut; who pare, repair;/Is statuary rated by its inches?'[76]. The answer is manifestly 'no', statuary is not rated by its inches, but it is rated by its sculpting, the technique of the sculptor, the finished effect, the display of artifice, the thing having been deliberately made the way it is by careful and painstaking work, and not least the effect it has on others. Similarly, with the diamond motif (which Hopkins also uses in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'[77]) Hopkins proposes the idea that man begins life as a 'rough' diamond, which during the process of life requires careful sculpting, the facets planed by choice, behaviour, underlying ethical belief, intent, deed. This idea of crafting is carried through the poem by different 'methods' of honing: within nature ('boughs'), with stone ('spires'), and wood ('posts'), and all are things are of a 'making' which man can do with his hands, behind

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Death' Jerusalem Plate 1 (proof) Tate Gallery (2000) p248; cf 'At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people' Zeph 1: 12

[70] 'What is virtue? Valour; only the heart valiant. And right? Only resolution; will, his will unwavering' No 152 p187: 'St Winefred's Well' lines 40ff

[71] cf No 150 p186: 'The times are nightfall'. See also 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' No 73 p106: 'But be the war within, the brand we wield/Unseen, the heroic breast not outward-steeled' with its emphasis on inner war and struggle with the self and one's choices, not a war directed outward at society or cause; thus 'Honour is flashed off exploit' – one gains honour for how one is, how one 'selves', and this is an heroic exploit, a different kind of soldiery.

[72] See the strained relationship between the individual and the 'state' presented by Hopkins in 'Tom's Garland' No 70 p103

[73] See No 57 p90: 'As kingfishers catch fire': 'the just man justices;/Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;/Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -/Christ'.

[74] See I Corinthians 12:12-27 and Paul's letter to the Ephesians 4:11-16.

[75] Thus he can say in 'The Wreck', s18, that he wants us to see 'the good you have there of your own' – the good that is in each of us and the value we should put upon every single life.

[76] No 96 p132 'Seven Epigrams' epigram vii

[77] 'This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,/Is immortal diamond'

which lie will, reasoned choice and endeavour. One 'guardedly diminishes' the self by careful sculpting, a cautious paring-down, in order that an inner 'moral' beauty can show through the external 'form' one's life takes. Thus we shall profit by using the lesser 'mill' of ourselves as we go through the mill of life, and by this process we make our own diamond 'immortal'. Hopkins wishes to stress that it is the act that is immortal, not the self. One's body and life are made both a sign and a sacrament to refract the immortal light in the cut panes[78]. 'Less is more' therefore, 'less is heavens higher even yet/Than treble-fervent more of other men'[79], for this is 'the lovely lot of continence'[80] and an expression of *ascesis* or 'training', the ascetic ideal which Hopkins strove for within his vocation, the refining capacity that, through discipline, leads to perfection.

Hopkins denounces the society which surrounds him[81]: 'Day and night I deplore/My people and born own nation,/Fast foundering own generation'[82]. This hyperbaton is prophetic in character, the speaker standing apart from society, looking on and passing judgement. Hopkins utilises the idea of physical 'wreck', the Eurydice and the Deutschland, to illustrate the wreck of society and its foundering. He means wreckage in spiritual terms, one man's 'fallenness' representative of the 'fallenness' of an entire generation; physical death the objective correlative of spiritual and moral death[83]. He continues: 'I might let bygones be'[84] (line 89), but the force of 'might' means 'he can't' and he deplores the fact that shrines are neglected. But it is the body as temple of the spirit he most mourns (line 93), the 'fleet/Life' so soon gone in 'Unchrist, all rolled in ruin' (line 96), for many fine men are cut-off without (Catholic) absolution when they die and Hopkins deplores this loss of souls. His critical function reaches to man's religion through man's deeds – only one religion is the True Church - and an important part of Hopkins' mission is that of conversion and 'saving'[85]. Franco Marucci believes that Hopkins' poetry is not exclusively directed at the reader's intellect, but rather aims to involve his

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[78] Yeats: 'Every argument carries us backwards to some religious conception, and in the end the creative energy of men depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but as an image in a looking-glass' Samhain Oct 1901-Nov 1908. Nos 1-7. Ed. W B Yeats. London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1970

[79] cf 'The Beginning of the End' No 14 p23 part (i)

[80] cf 'St Thecla' No 136 p175

[81] cf lines 86-88, 'The Eurydice'

[82] cf also No 150 p186: 'The times are nightfall, look, their light grows less;/The times are winter, watch, a world undone:/They waste, they wither worse; they as they run/Or bring more or more blazon man's distress'.

[83] cf Dylan Thomas: 'Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,/Robed in the long friends,/The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,/Secret by the unmourning water/Of the riding Thames./After the first death, there is no other' – one death representative of all. 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London', Deaths and Entrances. Dylan Thomas. Collected Poems (1934-1953). Eds. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud. London: J M Dent, 1993. p85

[84] And by that he means the Reformation and the confiscation of Roman Catholic churches and Cathedrals by Protestants.

[85] See 'The Wreck' s35: 'Our King back, Oh, upon English souls! ... More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls'. Also with respect to self: 'To him who ever thought with love of me/Or ever did for my sake some good deed/I will appear, looking such charity/And kind compassion, at his life's last need/That he will out of hand and heartily/Repent he sinned and all his sins be freed' No 140 p178.

intellectual, emotional, and physiological whole in order to convey a message of faith[86]. Hopkins' comments to his friends within his correspondence certainly show anxiety that they are not Catholics, and he continually expresses his hope (not often well received) that they might become so[87].

Hopkins' critical function is expressive of orientation within life based upon self-analysis. He asks by what criteria we steer our lives, believing that we must discriminate between surface appearance and interior reality. Nature may be brutish, but it is truer to its natural selving than is man, whose fall is one of (chosen) moral emptiness. Man can do otherwise, nature cannot. Hopkins wills us to emulate Christ in perspective and deed. His perspective of life as a conflict between contraries forces us to make crucial choices. He believes that we selve by doing and that we cannot escape the self. Hopkins' critique of humanity rests upon perception of spirit - the fiery force, the instress of God - active within materiality. Without this vision, man alienates himself from the life of the world and cannot re-orientate himself towards God. The 'wreck' of society can be challenged and changed through individual responsibility.

III

Within a mission of critical endeavour lies the compulsion to speak. Hopkins' compulsion comes from a variety of sources: his keen sense of vocation, his theological orientation towards Duns Scotus[88] rather than Thomas Aquinas, his priestly status, his Jesuit persona, his poetic drive, his Catholicism, the vows he made at Ordination, his salvific mission, his life of *ascesis*. The confusion of 'call' between the 'priestly' and the 'poetic' gave Hopkins an ongoing dilemma and resulted in schism – they occupied the same 'space' in his life but contradicted one another. The sources of compulsion may have been singly crucial but ultimately came together in a confused 'whole', a *satura* whereby Hopkins' compulsion to utter was felt as an overall imperative from God and was transmitted in turn to us as a didactic challenge to action through re-orientation of sight and perception. We should 'fear no iron rod'[89], but rather make the right choices that will lead us towards God. Hopkins chose compulsion (literally, to be mastered) and authority (to master in his turn):

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[86] Franco Marucci. The Fine Delight that Fathers Thought: Rhetoric and Medievalism in Gerard Manley Hopkins. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994. p30

[87] cf letter to Bridges: LI Jan 19, 1879 from St Giles's, Oxford: 'You understand of course that I desire to see you a Catholic or, if not that, a Christian or, if not that, at least a believer in the true God ...' Abbott (1935) p60

[88] Hopkins comments: 'I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddely Library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus' Journal entry 1872: House (1959) p221

[89] 'A Soliloquy ...' No 5 p14 s2

'I took of vine a cross-barred rod or rood'[90], instead of his 'national old Egyptian reed' which gave way, a metaphor for the Anglican church which failed to satisfy him. He bent willingly under a Catholic yoke, and went further by bending harder under the yoke of Jesuit life.

Later in life, following seven 'fallow' writing years[91], 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' testified to the compulsion which Hopkins felt as control or 'mastery' from God: 'THOU mastering me/God! Giver of breath and bread'[92] – God may give sustenance but in so doing he is the controller of Hopkins' life. This poem comprises dialogue with God, apostrophe to God, self-analysis, critique of humanity - all prophetic activities - as is the acknowledgement of the superior power of Deity. It presents a vision of a hidden and receding God who inhabits the edges of the world, the 'World's strand', the metaphysical lonely beach at the horizon which transcends real sight; yet also presents a God who is immanent and all-powerful, who controls the elements as well as the fate of human beings. Hopkins felt strongly the sense of mastery: 'Thou has bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh'. The idea of 'binding' and 'fastening' as images of imprisonment paradoxically also provide stability. Hopkins testifies to being physically 'touched', feels privy to the real and active presence of God and like a child searches for love and reassurance: 'I feel thy finger and find thee'. His God may be a protective father, but is one who can also instil 'dread', and this is resonant of Blake's 'double' God who is author of both the 'tyger' and the 'lamb'. This endows Hopkins' God with the characteristics of the Hebrew Bible God Yahweh.

This first stanza of 'The Wreck', testifies to a physical experience of God and his ability to instil both kindness and terror: 'I did say yes/O at lightning and lashed rod' – Hopkins compelled to utter 'yes' to his God who heard him in his heart 'truer than tongue' confess his terror. Yahweh knows the private moments his servant endures - Hopkins experiences the 'sweep' and 'hurl' of his treading[93], knows the horror of height and fall: 'O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed'[94], knows the physical

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[90] 'The Half-way House' No 20 p28 s2

[91] These 'fallow' years commenced in September of 1868 when aged 24 Hopkins entered the Society of Jesus following a visit to Switzerland to begin training for the priesthood. They ended in 1875 when he broke his silence by writing 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.

[92] 'The Wreck' No 28 p51 s1

[93] Counterpointed with Yahweh's treading is human treading which by contrast betokens generations of dull, plodding work which, far from improving man's lot and improving the world, is too 'dull-witted' to do anything but generate waste and decay: 'God's Grandeur' No 31 p66. Set against the 'grandeur' of God is the small-minded and unimaginative animal, man: not yet are we 'plod safe shod sound' 'Tom's Garland' No 70 p103, we have found no answers and seem powerless to change what we are: bred 'Hangdog dull', made animals by rage as we 'infest the age'.

[94] 'No worst, there is none' No 65 p100 - one of the so-called 'terrible' sonnets written in Dublin in 1885, witnessing to dryness and dearth, the spiritual experience of desolation and despair. cf also 'The shepherd's brow' No 75 p107 - Hopkins as 'shepherd' for the people of his various parishes, 'fronting' (confronting his God), written Dublin 1889,

experience of suffering: 'the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress' - all spiritual experiences of the might and terror of God attested to by mortal physicality. These experiences take Hopkins into 'limit' territory and he personifies the polarity of God's power and man's powerlessness.

In stanza three of 'The Wreck' the poet sees a real face: 'The frown of his face/Before me', a humanised God come down to earth but carrying infinite power. Before the speaker (and by implication, before us) only infinite danger, behind, no haven, and this uncertainty of the present, the in-between place of 'I am', unnerves the speaker, his words beginning to fragment: 'where, where was a, where was a place?'. In a dark place of self-immolation and ultimate loss, the speaker creates words that are not trapped by his strained physicality, but are made free by compulsion: 'I whirled out wings that spell'[95]. The speaker's praise can reach God but he cannot physically touch him. His words are like carrier pigeons, 'witted' because they bear the speaker's will and understanding, the words fiery with energy. Stanza four looks inward at what the speaker in reality is: mere dust and ashes. Hopkins' compulsion is experienced 'at the wall/Fast' where he is both imprisoned and supported. There is contrast between the image of a well that reflects objects and can have its depth plumbed but cannot move, connoting a unique 'selving', and the image of 'ropes' of water rushing down the hills towards a water-mass where the self is lost because subsumed into a greater whole. The speaker is both simultaneously water gathered and held, reflecting, and a moving vein of living water like a running stream. Both are the gift of Christ to him, just as he is Christ's gift to the world. Like the natural phenomena he personifies, the speaker has no option but to be fully what he is compelled to be, a representative principle with an active mission.

As if to make answer to the compulsion he feels, the poet adores the things of the world which exist to witness to a God who is both contained by materiality yet 'instressed' within it, infusing it with life and energy. It is Hopkins' mission to bear witness: 'His mystery must be … stressed', the fiery energy of God charging all things must be emphasised by his poetry, which itself is made up of 'stresses', an effective paronomasia. Through his words, God can be understood, met, greeted, and blessed (praised). The poet is compelling us to understand what we see, to interpret through his eyes and gain our own experience of God. Hopkins looked outward in his colloquy with Yahweh in stanzas one and two, he

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witnessing to the braving of God's power, a 'tyger' Yahweh who flings Angels out of heaven in his anger. cf Paradise Lost (1971) I: 740-745.

[95] cf Jeremiah: '... within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot' (20:7-9); cf Amos 3:8 – 'The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' See also Jer 6:11 & 15:17; 25:30-31; and Num 22:38. Isaiah testifies: 'For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me' (Isa 8:11).

looked inward and mused on his own relationship to him in stanzas three and four, in stanza five he is showing his perception of God. Next, in stanzas six through eight Hopkins gives us a narrational soliloquy. Both stress (inherent energy that is beautifully creative and sustaining) and stroke (sudden, possibly violent action causing death and destruction) represent God's double character[96] of 'tyger' and 'lamb' evinced by natural phenomena such as stars and storms[97] and their effects of wonder and fear. Yahweh's character is what 'rides time like riding a river' for it is eternally present.

The eternal river of Yahweh's being and action is bound up with Christ's person and presence in the temporal world. In stanza seven this is counted from his birth, through his 'goings' in Galilee and beyond, to the 'frightful sweat' of Gethsemane, the 'dense and driven Passion' of the crucifixion, and his death in a 'Warm-laid grave'. The interrupted syntax of the stanza mixes-up the time periods, undermining the perception of time as linear and finite[98]. Hopkins is looking at the past and speaking to the present with eyes that are *sub specie aeternitatis*. Christ is continually present, the events of his life existing before he was born and after he died, all subsumed by ongoing *anamnesis*: his 'instressing' as Yahweh's representative on earth transcends date: 'Though felt before', it is 'in high flood yet', riding time like riding a river. No-one can know this except by the heart alone, for only it, hard pressed, is able to know true truth (which the rational mind cannot accept) and is compelled to speak 'out with it!'. John Robinson notes that Hopkins' use of 'heart' in his poems is both distinctive and frequent - it is for him the 'primary agent in man of instinctive truth'[99]. Heart, the Hebraic discriminatory organ of will, sensibility, emotion and morality, is the core of faith and speaks to our non-rational selves[100]. In stanza eight the poet knows that we are all lashed with the best and worst of life, 'Word last', for word

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[96] See the frequent references to his 'double' character in the Hebrew Bible, represented by his instructions: Jeremiah 1:9-10: 'See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant'. cf also Jer 12:14-17.

[97] For other examples of Yahweh's 'character' see the 'dread' he engenders through his mastery in stanza one; the 'terror' of his 'lightning and lashed rod' in stanza two, the 'horror' of his 'height', the 'swoon' of the heart through the 'sweep and hurl' of his treading; the 'frown' of his face in stanza three; but *by contrast* his receiving and reciprocating 'heart' and 'grace' which the poet experiences when his own heart 'flashes' out toward him. cf also 'To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances'. Yahweh's power is attested to by Hopkins in the Dublin sonnets of 1885, particularly 'Carrion Comfort' No 64 p99, Jeremiac in its dialogic complaint: 'O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me/Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan/With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,/O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?'; cf Amos: 'The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up' (1:2) – Yahweh as destroying lion: 'The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (3:8)

[98] This is similar to the Hebraic prophetic texts which mix-up time periods and where tense is often indeterminate.

[99] John Robinson. In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. p50

[100] Hopkins comments: ' ...the heart is by common consent one of the noble or honourable members of man's body ... Is not all language, is not common talk, is not eloquence, is not poetry, all full of mention of the heart? ... not the piece of flesh so called, not the great bloodvessel only but the thoughts of the mind that vessel seems to harbour and the feelings of the soul to which it beats ... the beating of the heart is the truth of nature' Devlin (1959) p102

comes after we have tasted experience, uttering it[101]. Life as fruit both bitter and sweet[102] will 'brim us full' and early or late will cast us at Christ's feet. Despite ourselves we cannot help but 'go' – be active in our own right for we are made (and unmade) by what we do.

Stanza nine becomes a bidding prayer as well as a dialogue, amalgamating and uniting the person of Christ, the creating God, and the river of life into the 'three-numbered form' of the Trinity which the poet exhorts be 'adored among men', for it is adoration and faith that make them real. Paradoxically the heart that loves and obeys can be 'fondled' as well as 'wrung', the God of darkness and judgement who purifies, is also the God of Salvation and is 'most merciful then'. The twin properties of Yahweh are revealed in this stanza, the spiritual conviction of the speaker giving testimony to direct experience of his God[103].

Stanza ten is a plea to God to change mankind with whom the poet *qua* prophet aligns himself as representative[104]. He asks Yahweh to forge man out of his smithy in conformity with his will by remaking man in his own image, in order to raise him from the 'fallen' state in which he exists[105]. He pleads with Yahweh to melt the winter in man and bring him spring, bring each man to conversion as he did Paul on the road to Damascus[106], or gradually as he did St Augustine. The poet asks that God make 'mercy in all of us', that we treat each other correctly, that our 'shellèd eyes'[107] be uncovered and we come to see God as active principle within life and that he be adored King.

Stanzas 1 through 10 of 'The Wreck' are a meditation on, confession of, and witness to the compelling mastery and power of Yahweh. As God's disciple, Hopkins becomes himself

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[101] cf Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802) where he chose 'incidents and situations from common life' and related or described them 'in a selection of language really used by men; and … to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby *ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way*'. [my emphasis] He insisted that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', that it 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind' – thus: experience and feeling first, 'word last'. Romantic Poetry and Prose (1973) pp595, 596, 608

[102] See 'Lines for a Picture of St Dorothea' No 25 p35 whose basket carries 'treats of sweet for bitter', written Stonyhurst; a later version of No 10 p19: 'For a Picture of St Dorothea' (Oxford 1864) – the bitterness of martyrdom in life made 'sweet', redeemed by the joy of eternal life. (St Dorothea, martyred c303 under Diocletian, first tortured, then sentenced to death). See also Isaiah 5:20: 'Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!'.

[103] cf also re Christ in stanza 33 of 'The Wreck'.

[104] cf also Jeremiah's 'we' to Yahweh, when he aligns himself with the people as their representative: Jer 8:18-21: 'My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land … "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved". For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me'.

[105] cf 'The Alchemist in the City' No 15 p24, where the poet tries to make his own gold by way of alchemical distillation, forge himself out of ore, the effort aborted before it is begun, the pot will not glow, the gold not be discovered, the furnace already cold. Yahweh by contrast does not fail for he creates and destroys first, see Jer 6:27-30.

[106] See Acts 9:3-19. Note particularly 9:15 where Paul has been chosen as an 'instrument' to bring Yahweh's name before gentiles and kings as well as the people of Israel.

[107] cf 'The Habit of Perfection' No 22 p31

'a vein/Of the gospel', the compulsion he experiences passed on to us by way of stressed verse, his 'sprung' rhythm. This is Hopkins' didactic imperative and the dark spiritual conviction of his life, Jeremaic, to tell of the immediacy of God as against his hiddenness and recession. These latter qualities of the *Deus Absconditus* are often expressed by Hopkins in terms of a receding horizon metaphor, or presentation of geographic locations which are powerful yet out of reach: 'I desire the wilderness/Or weeded landslips of the shore'[108].

IV

Hopkins' vocation and his poetic utterance are founded on his personal experience of God as a *via negativa* and a *via positiva*. At the same time as he can claim closeness and presence: 'He is with you in the breaking of the bread'[109], or 'on a thousand altars laid,/Christ our Sacrifice is made!'[110], he looks beyond the immediate to a God who gives only spiritual absence and desolation. God does not have to reside in far shores or at one unattainable yet enticing spot on a receding horizon. Finding God and feeling the presence of God depends upon the sight, mind and perceptions of the person looking[111], and it is to these that Hopkins' vocation speaks. For John Pick this makes Hopkins 'a priest true to heaven and a poet true to earth'[112].

An early expression of a *Deus Absconditus* comes with 'Nondum'[113]. A few months earlier Hopkins had resolved to become a Catholic yet this poem is evocative of spiritual distress and dis-ease, and is similar to Jeremiah's 'complaints' before God[114]. The poem is dialogic yet the speaker asserts that 'No answering voice comes from the skies' and in spite of a sinner's repentance no forgiveness is forthcoming. The poem expresses the dichotomy inherent within faith, that the 'dialogue' with one's God appears more as a monologue, one-sided and weak. In contrast with Hopkins' ten sonnets of blessing and praise[115], 'Nondum' states 'We see the glories of the earth/But not the hand that wrought them all' – insight fails the onlooker and the vacancy and absence of God are strongly expressed. Religion itself is denigrated: we merely make God in our own image and all we

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[108] cf also 'A Vision of the Mermaids' No 2 p8; 'Winter with the Gulf Stream' No 3 p12; 'The Alchemist in the City' No 15 p24; 'The Half-way House' No 20 p28; 'Nondum' No 23 p32; 'Il Mystico' No 77 p111

[109] See 'The Half-way House' No 20 p28

[110] See 'Barnfloor and Winepress' No 6 p16

[111] See Jeremiah 23:23-24.

[112] John Pick. Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet. London: Oxford University Press, 1946. p56

[113] No 23 p32

[114] For Jeremiah's so-called 'confessions', see: Jer 11:18-12:6; 15:10-18; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-18.

[115] 'God's Grandeur', 'The Starlight Night', 'Spring', 'In the Valley of the Elwy', 'The Sea and the Skylark', 'The Windhover', 'Pied Beauty', 'Hurrahing in Harvest', 'The Caged Skylark', 'The Lantern out of Doors', written 1877 at St Beuno's, North Wales

do is set up a counterfeit in his seat. We are met with an unbroken silence and a metaphysical abyss that has the power to foil our gaze[116], its darkness 'blinding' us whilst 'being' itself causes bewilderment and lack of understanding. The world seems to fight itself and consciousness has the power to undermine an individual's belief until life is perceived as merely 'tomb-decked'. This is the place where faith must take over since certainty is left behind. Until a sense is given to us that shows God existing very near, all we have is the application of belief and patience. Our 'watching hearts' are the nearest we will get to eyesight, and it is to these that God is likely to speak[117].

'Nondum' is a dark vision of a God who is both hidden and removed. This poem prefigures the six Dublin sonnets[118] of 1885 and show that Hopkins already knew at 21, what despair in the face of God's 'blank unlikeness' felt like. Many of the poems early and late including this one, comprise Hopkins' personal and agonised dialogues with God. Hopkins' way of meeting such an absent God was through self-analysis[119]. His dialogic poems, which are effectively dialogues with God through a dialogue with self, deal with issues surrounding his vocation, issues of the fragmenting of individuality, the loss of self, of service and martyrdom, of the abnegation of the individual on behalf of the collective, and in these senses they echo Jeremiah's experiences and his pleas and exhortations before God. In spite of Hopkins' wrestling with absence and negation, vacancy and silence, the very use of 'thee' and 'thou' is a statement of faith in a relationship with silence which can only be met with silence[120].

Hopkins attempts to vanquish the self in order to give up his life to God. The difference between 'elective' and 'affective' will was an important distinction for Hopkins in this regard, particularly with reference to mastery of the physical body with its unruly desires which he saw as running counter to a pious and spiritually moral life. He was continually engaged in a 'see-saw' battle for control between his instinctive and natural inclinations, and his rational mind, willpower and directed action: controlled 'doing' in conformity with belief and value judgement: 'Oh, the sots and thralls of lust/Do in spare hours more thrive

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[116] cf Thomas: 'The Gap' from Frequences (1978)

[117] This links with the Hebraic idea of 'heart' being the seat of the will, the moral sense, righteousness. cf also 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' No 61 p97: 'Heart, you round me right' with the sense of 'sphering' or 'making perfect' the soul; see also the 'Dorothea' poems for this usage.

[118] 'Carrion Comfort', 'No worst, there is none', 'To seem the stranger', 'I wake and feel', 'Patience, hard thing!', 'My own heart let me more have pity on'.

[119] This approach is similar to R S Thomas' when faced with the hill farmers.

[120] See 'The Habit of Perfection' No 22 p31 for expression of meditative experience that involves the shutting-down of one's senses and within silence moving towards God; see also 'The Half-way House' No 20 p28, where one has to climb towards God, and he will do likewise, the communion rite being the point of contact; to 'see' you must 'see', to 'love', 'love' – willed act is crucial, not merely passive waiting.

than I that spend,/Sir, life upon thy cause'[121]. This struggle adversely affected his physical, mental and emotional (not to say spiritual) wellbeing, and led to a sense of self-hate expressed most vividly in the Dublin sonnets of 1885, particularly: 'I wake and feel'[122]. His bodily needs he saw as being animal-like, a regression: 'The lost are like this, and their scourge to be/As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse', further: 'He! Hand to mouth he lives, and voids with shame ... Man Jack the man is ... his mate a hussy'[123] and he chose to master himself (for 'soul is subtle and flesh weak'[124]) by way of an 'iron rod' of discipline: 'Penance shall clothe me to the bone'[125]. Hopkins continually attempted to subdue natural needs such as hunger, the instinct for sexual contact, thirst, the need for sleep, the desire for comfort, warmth, companionship, which he saw as 'sensual gross desires'[126], in favour of an austere *ascesis* which was directed, always, towards 'the habit of perfection' that represented in his eyes, walking with Christ. This quest was intensified by the fact that self-examination of one's attitudes, intentions and daily (indeed hourly) deeds, was a regular feature within the Order. Hopkins was acutely aware that his deeds would haunt him: 'There is a day of all the year/When life revisits me, nerve and vein'[127], and took drastic measures to discipline himself.

The paradox for Hopkins was that the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius which he practised regularly throughout his life as a Jesuit deliberately required, invoked and used bodily ability: the five senses channelled and enhanced to help recreate and make real different experiences of Christ's life, as well as evoking the reality of Hell[128]. This required a love and respect for the body as a real spiritual tool, whereas in Hopkins' private hours his bodily sensations, abilities and requirements were to be subjugated, for he believed they could lead one to excess and sin. He regarded his body as both evil and dangerous[129], and this led to a self-negation which involved flagellation[130], starvation, sleep deprivation[131], and deliberate self-harm during waking hours which ranged from using metal implements

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[121] 'Justus es' No 74 p106
[122] No 67 p101
[123] No 75 p107, 'The shepherd's brow'
[124] 'Il Mystico' No 77 p111
[125] 'A Voice from the World' No 81 p120, line 135
[126] 'Il Mystico' No 77 p111
[127] 'Pilate' No 80 p116, s8
[128] See The Spiritual Exercises in Devlin (1959), for example The Fifth Exercise - A Meditation on Hell p136: 'the first point will be to see with the eyes of the imagination ... the second, to hear with the ears ... the third, to smell with the sense of smell ... the fourth, to taste with the sense of taste'.
[129] The Spiritual Exercises demanded this. The Second Exercise, Third Heading No 58 exhorted the practitioner: '(4) Let me look at the foulness and ugliness of my body. (5) Let me see myself as an ulcerous sore running with every horrible and disgusting poison' Thomas Corbishley SJ. Tr. The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Hertfordshire: Anthony Clarke, 1973. p33
[130] See 'Easter Communion' No 11 p20: 'You striped in secret with breath-taking whips,/Those crooked rough-scored chequers'; also 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' No 73 p106: 'And those strokes once that gushed flesh or galled shield/Should tongue that time now, trumpet now that field' – connoting self-harm as a wound of war.
[131] See The Spiritual Exercises, Additional Practices, No 84(b): 'The second kind concerns sleep ... Penance consists in cutting down what is normal in our sleeping habits, and the more we cut down the better' Corbishley (1973) p39

attached to the thigh to cause pain[132], to deliberately sitting in uncomfortable chairs[133]. This conflict of the body as a sacramental sign, as against its propensity to enslave, is also apparent when Hopkins meets physical beauty in another, particularly a man, it being 'dangerous' because it sets the blood 'dancing'[134]. Aware of a homoerotic response in himself which he had to quash, Hopkins tried to 'leave, let that alone' and tried to counter his natural instincts by attempting to look inward at the man's self whose beauty might indeed 'flash' off his frame and face but in reality should be found 'Home at heart', where 'heaven's sweet gift' resides. Hopkins fought to love what is 'love's worthiest': men's inner selves and not their external beauty.

Hopkins wrote, in 1866 when he was only 21: 'Break the box and shed the nard[135];/Stop not now to count the cost'[136], proving that even then he understood that something must be fractured in order that something new may be created[137]. He asks us to throw all away upon Christ, for the whole ideal of Easter is that resurrection is possible. This is hope for himself and us, that despite what Hopkins saw as his own failings, his own trials, he could not give up. For him Easter was not only Christ-related, it also signified Spring, and he exhorts us to be active on our own behalf just as nature is active: 'bring', 'throw', 'build', 'deck', 'pluck', 'breathe', 'gather', 'take', 'wear', 'dance', 'seek', are his didactic imperatives – for not only Easter morn is a new rising but 'each morn' should be a time when we rise from our 'ruins of wrecked past purpose'[138] and live to a new day cleansed. Hopkins is at his most forceful when he issues us with commands, as he himself was commanded: do by choosing, be by being active[139], for he believes that what you do really matters within life and within the purposes of God.

This means that one's will can work in harmony with one's body, for it is our physicality that progresses our willed intentions, and the fusion of body, mind and spirit which

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[132] See The Spiritual Exercises, Additional Practices, No 85(c): 'The third form is to chastise the body by inflicting pain on it. This is done by wearing hairshirts or cords or iron chains, by scourging or beating ourselves and by other kinds of harsh treatment' Corbishley (1973) p39

[133] Hopkins comments in an early diary Jan 23, 1866: 'For Lent. No pudding on Sundays. No tea except if to keep me awake and then without sugar. Meat only once a day. No verses in Passion Week or on Fridays. No lunch or meat on Fridays. Not to sit in armchair except can work in no other way. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday bread and water' House (1959) p72

[134] 'To what serves Mortal Beauty' No 62 p98

[135] See Mark 14:3ff

[136] See 'Easter' No 24 p34

[137] Hopkins' words are aimed at 'breaking' the jaded state of mind and sight in order that renewed vision can be created that will 'redeem' the seer and bring him closer to external nature and thereby to spirit (in Thomas' poetry this is seen as a closing of the gap); cf Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802): 'For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor'. Romantic Poetry and Prose (1973) p598.

[138] See No 68 p102: 'Patience, hard thing!'.

[139] Even when in the midst of terrible despair and wrestling with his God, Hopkins believing 'these last strands of man/In me or, most weary, cry I can no more' – he immediately counters this with 'I can;/Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be'; 'Carrion Comfort' No 64 p99. cf No 152 p187: 'St Winefred's Well' lines 66ff.

Hopkins attempted throughout his life, *affective* will channelled into *elective* will, is paradigmatic of his vision for community that can function as a whole and pull together towards one end. This is a microcosmic singular and macrocosmic collective view of the symbiosis which occurs when all of our forces work together, and one does not dominate at the expense of another. Margaret Ellsberg comments that for Hopkins the relationship of the particular to the universal was direct, because of the Eucharist, in which both at once inhere[140]. For Hopkins, as with the prophets, man is in community with God only when in communion with himself. There are many references in the prophetic books to walking with God and what that means[141]. It is tempting to criticise Hopkins for an unbalanced and extreme approach to his physicality and for his choice of a life that ultimately led to consistent ill-health, melancholy and diminishment. However, his vocations required of him (as it required of the prophets) a dialogue with what individuality means and what the loss of self means: self-immolation to a greater end, that of community involvement and care, that of praise and 'making see': *fides occulata*, a faith with eyes[142]. Hopkins can be considered martyr-like for a greater cause, as were the prophets.

V

Hopkins' imperative to us to engage in this (prophetic) task of self-analysis and mastery, stands alongside his mission to conversion which involves the act of consciousness-raising. 'Ad Mariam'[143] has a manifesto quality and the intention is to make Mary come alive for the reader as a real person. There is a deliberate linking of Mary as woman with our experience of the seasonal cycle[144]: We have suffered Winter 'in sorrow' – and this relates not only to our experience of seasonal winter but also to the heart's winter – but May comes with Spring bringing joy in resurrection from our past selves. Springtime as a time of renewal[145] is the mother of the year and the mature 'proud mother' is also the 'proud

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[140] Margaret R Ellsberg. Created to Praise: The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins. New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1987. p75

[141] cf Jer 5:26-29 condemning injustice; 6:13 similarly; the 'temple speech' at 7:3ff, especially 7:5-7 for the 'if … then' construction; cf 7:23 for the covenant between God and the people: 'walk only in the way that I command you', also 26:4 and 26:13. See first two chapters of Amos for 'lists' of iniquities: 'threshing Gilead'; carrying into exile whole communities; forgetting the covenant of kinship; pursuing one's brother with a sword; killing women; killing kings; rejecting the law of the Lord and his statutes. 2:6-8 lists 'evil' behaviour: selling the righteous for silver, trampling the poor etc; 3:10 denounces violence and robbery; the beginning of chapter 4 denounces oppression and hypocrisy; 5:10-13 lists 'transgressions' and retribution. There is emphasis in Amos 5 (and elsewhere) on 'seeking' the Lord that you might 'live': 'seek me and live', 'seek the Lord and live', 'seek good and not evil that you may live' – Amos 5:24 pleads for 'justice' and 'righteousness' (compare 6:12).

[142] Rowan Williams comments: 'To be absorbed in the sheer otherness of any created order or beauty is to open the door to God, because it involves that basic displacement of the dominating ego without which there can be no spiritual growth' Rowan Williams. The Wound of Knowledge. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1979. p176

[143] No 26 p37

[144] See, especially in stanza 1, the 'wandering, wondering breath' of a Spring (May-time) breeze, being like the breath of a living woman as 'daughter' and as 'young year-mother'.

[145] See also 'Easter' No 24 p34, which puts forward the same argument.

maiden'[146] interchangeable within progression as the daughter in her turn becomes the mother. This is a synchronic replaying of the diachronic reclamation of Eden, both May and Mary (prefigured as Eve) dwelling in 'deep-groved Aidenn'[147], fall, winter, death, being continually gathered and renewed within the ongoing cyclic rebirth of nature. The promise of Summer also heralds the advent of Christ, the light of both being conflated just as Mary and May are conflated. The idea of the birth of the body also inheres within these images and May is personified as woman with her hair 'bound in flowers'. The tears of the hours are Mary's tears for both the birth and death of her son, tears of joy and sadness, but are also the April showers that help new life to grow, the 'breast' of both Mary and May suckling new life. The promise of Summer is the promise of the warmth of love, of Mary for her son, of Christ for humanity. If we are capable of seeing both Mary and May, and identifying them as one, we too can have joy in the turning of the year and the overturning of old ways.

Hopkins' task is to attempt an 'opening' of sight in this poem, identification of an 'ideal' image with real natural phenomena opens up new ways of perceiving May and Mary, new perceptions which can lead to a re-orientation of understanding from which belief and faith can flow. Wendell Johnson comments that for Hopkins, cosmic nature is simultaneously fallen and a source of grace, simultaneously mortal and a mode of showing forth the immortal; every concrete image in Hopkins inspires two responses and is concretely double[148]. Hopkins endeavours to turn eyes and hearts towards the True Church by representing Mary as a natural force as well as a real mother. His task is to make religion a real event, not an arcane liturgical falsehood, and he gives us a poem where generation and love are fused, the 'mythic' linking with the 'real' to enable us to climb inside faith[149]. He links Mary's metaphorical history and Christ's history in faith, by rooting both in our real experience of the real world.

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[146] The language of the third verse recalls Middle English lyrics of the 15th century, the 'song of spring' or *reverdie*, particularly 'I sing of a Maiden' where the poet visualises the mystery of the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in terms of a natural mystery, the falling dew: 'I sing of a maiden/That is makelees:/King of alle kinges/To her sone she chees. He cam also stille/Ther his moder was/As dewe in Aprille/That falleth on the gras. Moder and maiden/Was nevere noon but she:/Wel may swich a lady/Godes moder be'. See also 'The May Magnificat' No 42 p76, May and Mary being: 'the mighty mother' representing a 'world of good,/Nature's motherhood' which links both 'goodness' and 'virtue' with the cycle of the seasons, particularly Spring and renewal.

[147] cf another Marian poem: 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe' No 60 p93 which conflates the idea of Mary and air making her pervasive and life-sustaining, a 'nursing element' whose beneficial goodness is taken in repeatedly with each breath: 'My lung must draw and draw'; she mothers each new gift of life because each human being has the experience of being born of and nurtured by womanhood. 'Christs' are perennially being born: 'Of her flesh he took flesh:/He does take fresh and fresh', inculcating 'New Nazareths in us ... New Bethlems'. The 'old' God is always the 'new' one: 'So God was god of old:/A mother came to mould/Those limbs like ours which are/What must make our daystar', thus through Mary as 'all-woman' God is 'Sifted to suit our sight', made *accessible* to man through man just as God is 'sifted' through Hopkins' words 'to suit our sight'.

[148] Wendell S Johnson. Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poet as Victorian. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968. p50

[149] Hopkins' task revolves around his conception of the 'ideal': 'The best ideal is the true/And other truth is none,/All glory be ascribed to/The holy Three in One' No 133 p172: 'Summa'

'Rosa Mystica'[150] continues this theme - Mary presented as a mystic rose, a rose tree from which blossomed her son who was also to die on a tree. Her tree is a tree of generation and loss cut down in its prime. The blossom is likened to cherry blossom: white for purity, peace, virginity, and crimson for passion as well as blood[151]. The seasonal cycles are highlighted by the use of the trees and their cycles of fruition, decay and stasis. Winter exists within Spring, Summer and Autumn[152] just as Christ's passion and death exists within his birth and life[153]. Christ was cut down cruelly, like a tree, his five wounds correlate to our experience of five senses, five fingers, for 'Five is their number by nature'[154].

With these poems Hopkins' task is to bring the 'heavenly' down to earth by using the things of this world: trees, roses, cherry blossom, fingers, senses, colours, as objective correlatives to the metaphysical mystery of faith. This is an attempt at freshening our eyes so that we may look at ancient concepts in an immediate way. The poems are expressions of praise just as much as they are attempts to keep the faithful aligned, but they work harder than this by allowing unbelievers access to concepts which they might otherwise find impenetrable. The diachronic aspect of historical religion and practice is channelled into the synchronic immediacy of present experience. Hopkins' prophetic task within his poetics of self-analysis and mastery is that of a mission to conversion, praise and 'making see' through an attempt at consciousness-raising.

VI

Hopkins' critical function and critique of humanity; his compulsion to utter; his sense of vocation and stringent subsumation of self; his task of consciousness-raising through altered perception – can only be progressed within context, for it is context alone that makes these real. 'On Saturday sailed from Bremen,/American-outward-bound' begins stanza 12 of 'The Wreck'. Here is concrete detail[155] taken from newspaper reports, Hopkins reacting specifically to an event of his time. He may have been mastered by a vocation which displaced him from 'normality' and removed him to extremity and

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[150] No 27 p38

[151] See: 'Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers' and 'he scores it in scarlet himself'; 'ruddying of the rose-flake' in 'The Wreck' stanzas 21& 22.

[152] See 'Spring and Death' No 4 p13 for overt expression of this.

[153] cf 'Spring and Fall' for a comparable point, where the cycles of nature in a grove of trees show a child her own life in death, the sorrow we are all born for - No 55 p88

[154] See another presentation of this number in 'The Wreck' stanza 20 where the 'tall nun' is 'first of a five'; stanza 22: 'Five! the finding and sake/And cipher of suffering Christ./Mark, the mark is of man's make', 'Stigma, signal, cinquefoil token'; and stanza 23: 'And five-lived and leaved favour and pride'.

[155] See also 'Into the snows she sweeps,/Hurling the haven behind,/The Deutschland, on Sunday' (stanza 13).

marginalisation, but this did not mean that he was not within the life of his times. The wreck of the Deutschland spurred him to translate the event into a didactic *tour de force* whereby the death of nuns specifically, and passengers generally, became a *leitmotiv* for the expression of sacrifice[156], religious belief[157], praise for the working power and will of God[158], and hopes for Catholic conversion of England[159]. Earlier, 'The Escorial' had become a similar vehicle for expression of historicism and martyrdom. The poem traced a building's history from its beginning as a fortress of true faith to its end in abandonment, its 'poor collapsing frame' mirroring that of the saint's for whom it was built. Both poems show Hopkins' intention to use contextual concrete detail and event as useful vehicles for expression of a didactic message.

The most important context for Hopkins was his witness to the struggle for faith. An early expression of spiritual enquiry is 'The Half-way House'[160]. This is an analytical poem of relative position ('I creep') in relation to Deity ('Thou on wings dost ride'). The speaker tries to call down unreachable love because he feels his position to be half-way up to heaven and half-way down to earth[161], a position of paralysis and stasis. He testifies, analyses, and pleads. He sees himself as a 'doubting' Thomas but the poem ends with resolution: he is commanded to 'enter these walls' with the knowledge that Christ is with him in the breaking of the bread. The seeker has found where he stands in relation to a hidden and receding God and has transformed his (apparently useless) love into action and certainty by participating in the Mass, breaking bread with his God, thus nullifying the metaphorical (and metaphysical) distance between the two parties.

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[156] '... a lioness arose breasting the babble,/A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told'; 'She ... Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':/The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best'; cf Blake: 'Come then O Lamb of God Come Lord Jesus come quickly' Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the Eighth Page 104 (second portion) line 17 Complete Poems (1977) p419

[157] 'she ... Has one fetch in her: she rears herself to divine/Ears'; 'Five! The finding and sake/And cipher of suffering Christ'; 'the Master,/Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head'; 'ocean of a motionable mind;/Ground of being, and granite of it: past all/Grasp God, throned behind'; 'he is under the world's splendour and wonder'.

[158] 'They fought with God's cold-/And they could not'; 'God! giver of breath and bread'; 'One stirred from the rigging to save/The wild woman-kind below ... He was pitched to his death at a blow'; 'Thy unchancelling poising palms were weighing the worth,/Thou martyr-master'; 'He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;/Do, deal, lord it with living and dead'; 'I admire thee, master of the tides,/Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;/The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides'; 'did the dark side of the bay of thy blessing/Not vault them'; 'Breathe, arch and original Breath ... Breathe, body of lovely Death'; 'Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides'; 'The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his strides'. See also 'The Eurydice' No 41 p74: 'Till a lifebelt and God's will/Lend him a lift from the sea-swill' (lines 63-64).

[159] 'Heart, go and bleed at a bitterer vein for the/Comfortless unconfessed of them'; 'Our King back, Oh, upon English souls!/Let him easter in us'; 'More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls'.

[160] No 20 p28

[161] See a corollary to this in R S Thomas' poetry: the helix and the rope trick performer, where the poet is half-way up towards heaven, and half-way down towards materiality (hell): 'And because on the slope to perfection,/when we should be half-way up,/we are half-way down – Lord have mercy' ('Kyrie' from 'Mass for Hard Times'); 'from those waiting at the foot of the helix/for the rope-trick performer to come down, Gloria' ('Gloria' *ibid*); 'but to hold the position/assigned to us, long as time/lasts, somewhere half-way/up between earth and heaven' ('Stations'); 'who, from the rope-trick/of the language, called down/like an angel stranded/somewhere between earth and heaven' ('Circles') R S Thomas. Mass for Hard Times. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1992.

We are hearers of a dialogue with one voice – if the speaker is to achieve union with God when he dies, he must be in communion now on earth. His search is resolved, his ways meet: the 'crossroads' of journey and the calvary tree meet in the transept of a cathedral. A metaphysical journey with spiritual geography is made real by using the real contexts of building and bread. The analysis may be personal, the poem an expression of inner struggle and resolution, but the consequences are impersonal and universal in that we can do likewise. Struggle was the spiritual context of Hopkins' life, his experience of humanity, his yearning for divinity, his position being 'half-way up' and 'half-way down' between both, fixed in a non-resolvable 'fallenness'. The poem testifies to the loss of God, the reality of God divided-off from man by an unseen geography that, physically, we cannot cross. The poem also works within a context of self-consciousness and self-analysis, the understanding of relative position in relation to something else, fixed points by which we might navigate a difficult world. Hopkins' spiritual yearning here is prophetic of his later choice to enter the Society of Jesus, to be 'half-way' towards God and 'half-way' from man and wider society, a 'no-man's-land' of marginalisation and displacement. This poem 'The Half-way House' also prefigures by a year Hopkins' conversion to Catholicism; perhaps his understanding of his own spirituality at this time was half-way from Anglicanism and half-way towards the True Church.

To return to 'The Wreck', Hopkins provides a context of real human tragedy, stanzas 12 through 17 are written like an eyewitness account. The detail is credible and there is a hyperbaton within stanza 12 as the poet addresses God; God is another 'context' for the poem, the ways in which he controls life in order to further his own willed design. God's power over the elements is emphasised, as well as his ability to undo life and unknit the matrix of personal relationships which sustain us. Hopkins places unknown people (everyman) within the context of a known event, and places himself within the context of the poem in relation to everyman as eye-witness and representative, a direct comparison being drawn between his own (safe) context and the disastrous fate of the passengers and seamen. Hopkins is representative of all, in any time, who are safe at home in bed whilst on the other side of the world tragedy is striking. Hopkins' point is that being good does not save you from an unjust fate, for all is under the jurisdiction of God's will that sees all ends and controls all things. Human strength is no match for the context of the power of God[162], and what God might ask is sacrifice.

[162] A man's strength is nothing before God: see Amos 2:14-16 & 4:10.

Hopkins lived and worked within many 'contexts': the sophisticated and literary world of Oxford where he read Classics at Balliol College; teaching at Edgbaston Oratory School under Newman; his ascent through the *Novitiate, Philosophate, Theologate*, Ordination and *Tertianship* of the Priesthood; his service as missioner, parish priest and teacher in London, Oxford again, Bedford Leigh (a small industrial town near Manchester); the crowded and thriving parish of St Francis Xavier in Liverpool; and St Joseph's in Glasgow. He also taught Latin and Greek at Stonyhurst College, Blackburn, before being appointed Professor of Greek Literature at University College, Dublin. Throughout these years, Hopkins was exposed to varying levels of interaction with fellow priests and parishioners. He had direct experience of the serious adverse effects of industrialisation on people's lives, working within the city slums, and was deeply horror-stricken at the squalour he encountered[163]. His poetry is prophetic in that it reflects these various experiences, reacts to the contexts in which he found himself, and is expressive of place and time. Like the ancient prophets Hopkins was nomadic, speaking out of, and to, the contexts within which he found himself – displaced yet working at the (often unseen) heart of society with the poor. His contexts of middle-class privilege and 'learnedness' as an Oxford graduate and a Jesuit, are deeply at odds with the contextual application of faith which he practised among the disadvantaged – and therein perhaps lies his feeling of both failure and shame within vocation.

VII

The authority of Hopkins' writing, his belief in himself and the authenticity of his poetry[164] rests upon control and mastery from God, experienced as personal 'contact' or inspired[165]

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[163] Hopkins comments in a letter to Dixon: XXII Dec 1, 1881 from Manresa House, Roehampton: 'My Liverpool and Glasgow experience laid upon my mind a conviction, a truly crushing conviction, of the misery of town life to the poor and more than to the poor, of the misery of the poor in general, of the degradation even of our race, of the hollowness of this century's civilisation: it made even life a burden to me to have daily thrust upon me the things I saw' Claude Colleer Abbott. Ed. The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon. London: Oxford University Press, 1935. p97

[164] Hopkins' confidence in his own authoritative poetic utterance can be seen from his repudiation of Bridges' criticism re 'The Wreck': 'When a new thing, such as my ventures in the Deutschland are, is presented us our first criticisms are not our truest, best, most homefelt, or most lasting but what come easiest on the instant. They are barbarous and like what the ignorant and the ruck say. This was so with you' – letter to Bridges from Stonyhurst College, Blackburn, May 13th, 1878: Poems and Prose (1963) pp178-9; cf also: 'The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise. So it must be on every original artist to some degree, on me to a marked degree' - letter to Bridges from University College, Dublin, Sept 25th, 1888. *ibid* p210

[165] Hopkins comments in a letter to Patmore: CXXIV Sept 10, 1864 from Blunt House, Croydon: '... the language of verse may be divided into three kinds. The first and highest is poetry proper, the language of inspiration ... a mood of great, abnormal in fact, mental acuteness, either energetic or receptive, according as the thoughts which arise in it seem generated by a stress and action of the brain, or to strike into it unasked ... the poetry of inspiration can only be written in this mood of mind, even if it only last a minute, by poets themselves' Claude Colleer Abbott. Ed. Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins including his correspondence with Coventry Patmore. London: Oxford University Press, 1956. p216; Hopkins thought of inspiration as 'the gift of genius' which raises the poet 'above himself' *ibid* p216

(compelled) utterance[166]. Hopkins' authority as priest rested upon his belief in the Catholic Church as 'A fortress of true faith'[167] and during his life on behalf of this faith, he chose to endure the 'barren rigour' and the 'frigid gloom'[168] which the Jesuit order demanded. This was his pious work[169], and 'The Escorial' seems to be personally prophetic in this regard, since the large 'cloister'd convent' was erected in memory of St Lawrence who was martyred. This early poem shows Hopkins' reverence for such individuals who gave up their lives in service of an ideal, and he returns to this issue in later poems[170]. The ideal of martyrdom means bearing witness and places value and significance in what the individual witnesses to, rather than a focus on the sacrifice of self. Hopkins' witness to Catholicism both as a convert and as a Jesuit was his self-sacrifice for a greater cause. The primacy of the architecture in 'The Escorial', its 'sombre length of grey', seems to prefigure the succession of large and bare houses within which Hopkins would spend the entirety of his adult life.

The authority for any individual to give up his or her life for God, comes from God, Hopkins declaiming that one does not have to be 'gorged with proof'[171] in order to believe. His authority to speak comes early on and as inspiration: 'He hath put a new song in my mouth,/The words are old, the purport new,/And taught my lips to quote'[172]. Such inspiration is 'The fine delight that fathers thought'[173] and Hopkins likens this male 'insemination' to flame and fire: 'the strong/Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,/Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came[174]/Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song'. Hopkins is conceiving of the inspirational moment as a triadic event, the father inseminating the mother, who is then made a widow by the brief and fiery ejaculation of the male who like a flame expires. She then gives birth to a child: the

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[166] cf Austin Farrer's comment: 'Poetry and divine inspiration have this in common, that both are projected in images which cannot be decoded, but must be allowed to signify what they signify of the reality beyond them ... Inspiration does not merely stand at a midway point between poetry and metaphysics; it actively communicates with both ... For inspiration teaches us about God, and God's existence is one of the mysteries which metaphysical discourse describes.' Austin Farrer. The Glass of Vision. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948. Lecture VIII p148

[167] 'The Escorial' stanza 5 No 1 p3

[168] 'The Escorial' stanza 1

[169] 'The Escorial' stanza 1

[170] See also No 10 p19: 'For a Picture of St Dorothea' and No 25 p35: 'Lines for a Picture of St Dorothea; also the Winefred poems: 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' No 59 p91; 'On St Winefred' No 139 p178; 'St Winefred's Well' No 152 p187; 'The Wreck' stanza 23: 'Joy fall to thee, father Francis,/Drawn to the Life that died'. Cf also Hopkins' comments on submitting to his father's authority: 'Bid your Papa Goodnight. Sweet exhibition!/They kiss the Rod with filial submission' No 97 p134: 'By Mrs Hopley' and to the authority of the Church: 'all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod' No 64 p100 'Carrion Comfort'.

[171] 'A Soliloquy ...', line 41 No 5 p14

[172] 'He hath abolished the old drouth', lines 4-6 No 8 p18

[173] 'To R.B.' No 76 p108

[174] cf Shelley: 'Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure' A Defence of Poetry quoted from The Norton Anthology of English Literature. 6th edn. Vol 2. Ed. M H Abrams. New York & London: W W Norton & Company, 1993. pp761-2

'immortal song' that is Hopkins' poetry. This image of the blowpipe flame is redolent of the fiery energy of Yahweh in 'God's Grandeur' which 'charges' life like voltage. Hopkins' 'Sweet fire' is the sire of his muse which his soul needs in order to survive. The 'deaths' Hopkins dies daily, his passions and torments, paradoxically feed his 'flame'[175] – they are his fire and fever, the inspirational 'spurs' or compulsions he feels to utter, to master himself by mastering language. Authority is an issue of being controlled and being controlling in turn.

Hopkins therefore finds and masters his music 'in a common word,/Trying each pleasurable throat that sings'[176]. The act of writing (singing) by way of different throats or voices, through different selves is what gives him 'The authentic cadence' that is the 'dominant'[177] of his being. Hopkins' experience of authority is to witness by uttering. The authority he has is the music he hears and is his own singular note and voice. What he utters is a combination of both. Hopkins discusses to what extent an artist has free-will in creation in 'On a Piece of Music'[178]: 'Who shaped these walls has shewn/The music of his mind,/Made known, though thick through stone/What beauty beat behind/Not free in this because/His powers seemed free to play:/He swept what scope he was/To sweep and must obey'. Hopkins is what he is because God made him that way – God's enlivening force charges through him. His powers seem free but are not free; the beauty that beats within him is the presence of God and Hopkins can only obey that mastery. Thus: 'Though down his being's bent/Like air he changed in choice,/That was an instrument/Which overvaulted voice'. The authority of God uses him as instrument, God's voice overarches his. In much the same way that 'the just man justices'[179], so 'the poet poets' and can do nothing else but be himself, 'for that he came'. Hopkins makes the connection between God's creative authority and the creative authority of the artist: 'What makes the man and what/The man within that makes:/Ask whom he serves or not/Serves and what side he takes'. The man may be able to choose sides, but what he creates comes only from God. Hopkins' authority rests on the choices he made, which he believed to be just: 'For good grows wild and wide,/Has shades, is nowhere none;/But right must seek a side/And choose for chieftain one'. Thus, the creative product and the authority it holds comes from a fusion of man and God, God voiced and fired through man because aimed at man; the creative

[175] No 75 p107 'The shepherd's brow'
[176] 'Let me be to Thee as the circling bird', Petrarchan Sonnet, No 19 p28
[177] 'dominant' having the connotation: 'to dominate' as well as being the main sequence of notes.
[178] No 148 p184
[179] 'As kingfishers catch fire' No 57 p90

individual being the medium for 'expression and news' of God who can neither exist nor be expressed without human intervention[180].

Hopkins can say with confidence, later on in his life, that he finds his 'aim/Now known' and his 'hand at work now never wrong'. He has come to trust in his own authority, the inspirations born of the stresses and torments his vocations engender, the words that come 'unbidden and against his will'. Yet he still thirsts for the ultimate utterance, another experience of the mastery from God: 'I want the one rapture of an inspiration' as if this were the only true aim left in life. The chiasmus within the poem effectively ties together the syntactic logic: 'Breathes' in quatrain one links with 'inspiration' in line 10; 'flame' in the first quatrain links with 'fire' in line 9; the two arms of the cross lock together the double idea of 'breath' and 'flame'. This explanation of his poetic and religious authority to utter, sent to Robert Bridges, tells us that his aim is to praise and 'make see': 'The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation' of life, particularly nature, within which exists an indwelling God whose fiery, renewing energy infuses all things. Hopkins' 'winter world' that scarcely breathed any 'bliss' within his choice of vocation and his experience of that choice over the whole of his adult life with its inherent dichotomies, has eventually birthed an eternal 'Spring'. His inspired authoritative words remain an invocation of, and testament to, the reality of Yahweh, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the 'three of the thunder-throne', as he saw and experienced them. The authority which he felt he had been given, in vocations both poetic and religious, is transmitted to us by the authority of his words which attest to his vision of the reality of spirit within the material world.

VIII

Hopkins' call to the priesthood, his commissioning to a poetics of sacrifice and praise, is bound up with these ideas of authority and mastery, the image of the 'blowpipe' denoting the channel or medium for inspired utterance through man. The hyperbaton or 'suspense' of stanza 18 of 'The Wreck', where there is an authorial withdrawing, shows Hopkins being explicit about being a spokesman for God. He pleads, 'make words break from me here all alone', in order that he can utter 'truth' from his heart, the regulatory moral organ of the self, the mother of his being[181]. This is his claim, as God's instrument, to the flow of inspiration but it is his own 'tears', his empathic emotion that is the fountain[182] of his song,

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[180] See Chapter 2 p26

[181] See footnote 100 above

[182] See No 155 p194: 'Thee, God, I come from, to thee go,/All day long I like fountain flow/From thy hand out'. cf Jeremiah 2:13: 'for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water'; and John 7:38: 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'.

his 'madrigal'. The inspired flow from God mingles with his experiencing self as man and Jesuit, to create the product: poetry. The call to utter, the call to poetic vocation, is a singular synchronic evocation of a diachronic poetic phenomenon[183], the individual contributing in one time to the never-ending 'Never-eldering revel and river of youth' that is the life of poetry through all time. Stanza 18 is Hopkins' expression of emotion at the disaster which claimed many lives. He is the medium of its message, the being who is touched to his bone by the experience[184], spurred to write, and through these 'turned' towards God, shaped and fashioned in God's hands, made fit for purpose. The event of the wreck called him to write of it. He wants the shock he felt to be transmitted to us in turn, in order that we can see the event through his eyes and be equally affected. The call to write comes from a source outwith Hopkins, the trigger unlooked for. The 'glee' expressed by Hopkins is the exhilaration both the poet and the nun feel, the glee of knowing themselves to be called by God for a higher purpose.

Call is commissioning. Hopkins and the nun he writes of are called to be *imitatio Christi*, called to praise God by serving God, commissioned to carry out a vocation and a deed. The pain, the 'smart' both experience is exquisite because it raises them towards Christ by their suffering as an example to many – and this is the 'good' they both have of their own. We are commanded to 'Read' the shock of that night[185] through Hopkins' words; he is 'Wording it' (the experience, the facts, the emotion, the horror, the faithfulness, the sacrifice) 'by him', ie: by way of God, by way of his gifted breath, his inspiration that 'present and past,/Heaven and earth are word of' and 'worded by'. The divine *logos* Christ is testified to by way of this poem, 'worded' by human life and experience, just as Christ 'words', represents us by way of his deeds. The 'heart-throe'[186], the heart wrung by agony, is birthed in the brain, man's medium for the uttering of inspiration. Hopkins' words, his ode, his portrayal of the nun, are all channels for the message of conversion to Catholicism, which in his eyes is true alignment towards God specifically, but also work towards faith in general. The 'shipwrack' is indeed God's harvest and the tempest does carry His grain as he gathers his own souls back to him – he brings in the sheaves. Hopkins felt the call to

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[183] T S Eliot comments: 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' Thomas Stearns Eliot. Selected Essays. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1934. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' p15; as Auden said of Yeats: 'The words of a dead man/Are modified in the guts of the living' 'In Memory of W B Yeats' Auden (1979) p81; Shelley comments: poetry produced by the individual is therefore merely 'episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world' Defense (1891) p23

[184] cf Jeremiah's comments about the spur to write: 'within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot' (20:7-9); cf Amos 3:8 – 'The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?'. See also Jer 6:11 & 15:17; 25:30-31; and Num 22:38. Isaiah testifies: 'For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me' (Isa 8:11).

[185] 'The Wreck' s29

[186] 'The Wreck' s30

write this poem, believing God to be the instigator of the disaster, and believing himself to be its spokesman.

As spokesman for God, called to be the channel of his message, commissioned to live a vocation as *imitatio Christi*, Hopkins can say that faced with and challenged by his master's power in nature and over human life, he 'admires' him[187], for all events are evidence of his 'motionable mind' because he is 'throned behind' both life and death with all sovereignty. Hopkins' words help us 'Grasp God' and are 'an ark/For the listener'[188], for in the midst of the flux and reflux of time and fate, his words ride time like 'riding a river'[189]: they endure. Hopkins' messages in this way become 'a vein/Of the gospel'[190], proffered to any that read them, a transfusion for those who have lost faith and are 'pent up'[191] in the prisons of their minds where their blindness and deafness 'Lower than death and the dark' prohibit them from turning towards God.

'The Wreck' ends with a prayer to the nun drowned off our shores, become a martyr and saint, a new channel for messages to and from God as we can pray to her to 'Remember us in the roads'. Hopkins hopes that his words, the nun, his prayers, all within this poem, can be media for the plea to re-align England to Catholicism; but more than this Hopkins wants Christ to forever 'Easter' in us[192], that we might renew his example within ourselves and redeem our world by being channels in turn, exemplars to others. The poem ends with an encomium to Christ, for whom Hopkins in his own life chose to be, to the best of his ability, a mouthpiece by being a humble example, chivalrous, charitable and kind.

Hopkins' call to vocation meant that he led a nomadic life, wandering from place to place at the behest of his Order, at once everywhere and nowhere. As if to counteract such an exile, comprising displacement, marginalisation, and journey, Hopkins attempts a theology of place that pinpoints humanity within the cosmos. This also allows Hopkins to orientate himself within what is effectively a called 'wilderness' experience and enables him to navigate a spiritual world as opposed to locating himself solely within the temporal. Instead of compressing and confining God into one small space, the official 'Temple of the Lord', he is interested in the polarity between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic which locates temporal man in juxtaposition with eternal heaven. Through such an approach, Hopkins can contrast the small with the large, see the infinite within the infinitesimal, and

[187] 'The Wreck' s32
[188] 'The Wreck' s33
[189] 'The Wreck' s6
[190] 'The Wreck' s4
[191] 'The Wreck' s33
[192] See 'Easter': 'Make each morn an Easter Day' No 24 p34

direct us to perceive that within the smallest flower we can see God[193]. Peppered throughout Hopkins' poetry are motifs which emphasise these: the 'inner firmament'[194] described as being like fair beds of water-lily flakes: earth-bound materiality an objective correlative for unattainable heaven. In 'Barnfloor and Winepress'[195] similar parity is made between the cosmic and the earthly: 'On Easter morn the Tree was forth,/In forty days reach'd Heaven from earth;/Soon the whole world is overspread'; the Calvary Tree becomes an 'earthly' tree, but in this case the crown of the tree is in 'Heaven' and the 'whole world' is overspread with its branches, its roots in the earth. This metaphor is used to denote the spread of belief around the planet, and also Christ's arms stretching to encompass humanity, with the Father's life force welling from the tree which He upholds and sustains from within.

Hopkins continues the polarity of the 'earthly' and the 'heavenly' within 'For a Picture of St Dorothea'[196]. He uses images such as stars or dew to denote place and relative size[197], using these to underline Dorothea's state as belonging to both realms as real woman and celestial martyr. Her link with both places is strengthened by the fact that she holds a 'quince'[198] in hand, fruit of earth, yet look again and it is 'the sizing moon'. She is much greater as martyr than she was as woman, in terms of relative size, so large in heaven she can hold the moon in her hand. Hopkins also uses *antanaclasis*[199], Dorothea's 'milky ways' meaning both her mildness in terms of character, and her sustaining and nurturing milk which, like a mother, she offers us. She is our way of grace, our medium to God. Our eyes looking up at the heavens are not the same as a martyr's eyes, or God's eyes, looking down at us, and their relative size in comparison to ours is fittingly infinite to infinitesimal, denoting the relationship between creator and creature.

Another correlative in the poem is that of 'sphere' to 'soul'. The word sphere recalls not only the shape of the dewdrop but also stars and planets, again highlighting juxtaposition

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[193] cf Julian of Norwich's testimony: 'Our Lord showed me a spiritual vision .. And in this vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, lying in the palm of my hand, and to my mind's eye it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came to me, 'It is all that is made''. Julian of Norwich. Revelations of Divine Love. Tr. Elizabeth Spearing. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1998. 'The Short Text 4' p7; See also Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence': 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour'. 'The Pickering Manuscript' Complete Poems (1977) p506

[194] See 'A Vision of the Mermaids' No 2 p8

[195] No 6 p16

[196] No 10 p19. Dorothea was tortured and sentenced to death, a martyr, in c303 under Diocletian.

[197] Compare: 'The dew-bell in the mallow's mouth/Is it quenched or not?/In starry, starry shire it grew:/Which is it, star or dew?', 'Lines for a Picture of St Dorothea' No 25 p35

[198] cf Robert Graves: 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice' stanza 4: 'Or is it of the Virgin's silver beauty,/All fish below the thighs?/She in her left hand bears a leafy quince;/When with her right she crooks a finger, smiling' – with reference to Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, whose emblem is the quince. Robert Graves. Selected Poems. Ed. Paul O'Prey. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986. p158

[199] 'breaking back against' – a figurative device where a word is used twice or more in two or more possible senses, viz this poem and 'milk' in 'The Eurydice' line 102

and size. The sphere is also the figure of perfection: to be 'sphered' means to be completed, perfected, also to have ripened like a fruit. This aligns with the image of the quince, and 'sphere' as in 'circle' recalls the moon. Hopkins interchanges these images, but he means the soul itself to be 'sphered'[200], thus Dorothea's soul has come to completion like a ripe fruit which is, in martyrdom, 'plucked' by God[201] and set amid the firmament as an eternal 'star'[202].

Hopkins' theology of place, which counterpoints his call and commissioning to a nomadic life, continues with 'The Eurydice'[203]. The 'Bright sun lanced fire in the heavenly bay' conflates the 'sun' of the sky with the 'son' of heaven; a real geographical bay, with the vault of heaven[204]. The unreachable and unreal vault of heaven is contrasted with grounded place names such as 'Carisbrook', 'Appledurcombe', 'Ventnor town', in order to highlight the fact that God's will works through real places and real people, that 'Sydney Fletcher Bristol-bred' is 'saved' because God willed it so. The reference to the milky way as a guide to pilgrims makes the same pun on the word 'milk' that we saw in 'St Dorothea' – the 'milk' of human kindness paralleled by Mary's milk that suckled Christ, and the milk that feeds us, her sainthood being our mediation. The milky way as guide also connotes the star that the wise men were guided by; there are 'starlight-wenders' who use the stars as guide[205], and Christ himself should be a 'guiding star' for he is the infinite power within infinitesimal man. Hopkins' call to displacement can use Christ as a pole-star: a compass point that steadies.

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[200] See again: No 81 p120: 'A Voice from the World' lines 34ff: 'And you are gone so heavenly far/You hear not care of love and pain'; 'But you, so sphered, see no more -/You see but with a holier mind -/You hear and, alter'd, do not hear/Being a stolen apparel'd star'. cf the ending of the 'St Dorothea' poem, No 10 p20: 'We see/Nor fruit, nor flowers, nor Dorothy'.

[201] cf: 'was your writ/Served by messenger?/Your parley was not done and there!/You went into the partless air': 'Lines for a Picture of St Dorothea' No 25 p35

[202] See both Sidney and Spenser for the Renaissance idea of woman being perfected and remembered as 'stars' in the heavens: 'Astrophil and Stella' 10 (Sir Philip Sidney) and 'Amoretti' sonnet 75 (Edmund Spenser). Norton Anthology I (1993) pp459 & 737; cf Percy Bysshe Shelley: 'Adonais' (1821) last two lines: 'The soul of Adonais, like a star,/Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are'. Norton Anthology II (1993) p731 - Shelley prefixed to 'Adonais' a Greek epigram, attributed to Plato; this is his own translation: 'Thou wert the morning star among the living,/Ere thy fair light had fled -/Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving/New splendour to the dead'. See also Adonais' triumph over death in stanzas 44-46. cf Hopkins' 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' No 72 p105 where man shines like 'a star' with an undying soul: the Resurrection ensures that *sub specie aeternitatis* man remains an 'immortal diamond', an undying star in the firmament.

[203] 'The Loss of the Eurydice' No 41 p72

[204] cf the polarities in Amos 5:8 and 9:2 where 'the Pleiades and Orion' are contrasted with 'the surface of the earth', the far with the near, the unknown with the known, and the relative differences in metaphorical height between 'Sheol' and 'heaven'; the 'top of Carmel' and 'the bottom of the sea' – real things: 'the sea-serpent', the 'waters of the sea', 'day' and 'night' contrasted with unreal, mythical and unattainable places. Such juxtapositions emphasise the micro/macro relationship, man in juxtaposition with God, the things man knows with places that are unreachable yet paradoxically 'known': 'You should have been with me as near/As halves of sweet-pea-blossom are;/But now are fled, and hard to find/As the last Pleiad' lines 43-46, 'A Voice from the World' No 81 p120. Such effects seek to locate man within a familiar milieu from which he reaches out and up towards God through God's creations, in order that he can better understand himself. cf: 'her earliest stars, earlstars, stars principal, overbend us,/Fire-featuring heaven' 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' No 61 p97.

[205] cf the later reference to: 'Where lies your landmark, seamark, or soul's star?/There's none but truth can stead you. Christ is truth' No 157 p196: 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People'. This means that Christ is the star one should follow in order to find one's moral and spiritual way.

The relative size and location of man, juxtaposed with the cosmos, is emphasised by 'The Eurydice' where infinitesimal people, all pressed together, are terrified within the vast and overwhelming power of the elements. Both the nun of 'The Wreck' and 'Sydney Fletcher' are singular exemplars of heroism and the application of stoicism in the face of imminent death. Hopkins uses them as microcosmic singular experiences located with the macrocosmic chaos of wider life. The idea of 'one', or singularity, in 'The Eurydice' and 'The Wreck', is often juxtaposed with the 'many', the collective. Hopkins' use of this contrary illustrates that we are all similar beings who can share the same reactions in a given situation, yet each individual's experience of life (and death) will be unique. This is the *discordia concors/concordia discors*[206] which Hopkins expresses elsewhere with his ideas of 'dappling': the identifying marks which align like things together whilst at the same time emphasising their uniqueness and diversity[207]. Hopkins sees the 'many' in the 'one', just as he uses the 'one' as a representative of the 'many', and he moves back and forth from the collective to the individual, emphasising the relationships of polarity, location, and juxtaposition.

It can be concluded that Hopkins' call or spur to write comes through his experience of deep emotional disturbance in response to external events. He feels commissioned to be *imitatio Christi* in vocation, called to praise through the living of an ascetic, pared-down lifestyle. He calls on us to see through his eyes, to perceive God throned behind life's material being and processes, believing his own words to be an ark for the listener that carries spiritual truth. His call to a nomadic vocation results in attempts at orientation and navigation through a theology of place that seeks to locate man within the cosmos.

IX

Hopkins' prophetic witness analyses the quotidian *sub specie aeternitatis*. His poetry of social witness is to *chronos* within *kairos*, he witnesses to a specific point in time whilst expressing the ahistorical abandonment of time. In so doing, he testifies by his own quotidian eyes, mind and heart, sieved through a contextual nineteenth century arena which saw a vast expansion of industrialisation and concomitant pollution. Hopkins experienced the effects of these first-hand in Liverpool and Glasgow, working with his parishioners in

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[206] This seeks to explain unity through diversity (common ground within disparity); and seeks to explain the 'stand alone' quality of uniqueness and singularity, which are simultaneously encompassed and made one by the opposing concepts of collectivism and community.

[207] See 'Pied Beauty' for a list of congruent 'dappled' things which emphasise the holistic quality of 'dappledness' yet 'counter' one another with strangeness and unlikeness, because each similar thing is paradoxically unique.

conditions of squalor and poverty. Hopkins' awareness of politics, employment and disempowerment is expressed in such poems as 'Harry Ploughman', 'Tom's Garland' and 'Felix Randal'. However his subjective witness to life and people is expressed through poems like 'In the Valley of the Elwy'[208] which begins 'I remember a house'[209].

In his poems of witness, we are invited to join Hopkins in his experience of various aspects of life and people. His eyes are wholly individual and subjective but this invalidates neither the poetry nor the experience testified to, indeed a subjective response provides us with a compass point by which we might orientate ourselves, by agreeing or disagreeing with what is expressed. Hopkins tells us in 'Hurrahing in Harvest'[210]: 'Summer ends now; now', here and now, this minute, where literally 'I am', and he gathers us to him by continuing his narrative with descriptions of the fields and the weather in the present tense, as if we too were there: 'I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes' drawing attention to what he does, what his own being is actively engaged in, perceiving the world 'up' and 'down' to 'glean our Saviour'. Hopkins is foregrounding the Scotist tradition which sees true being in life and nature as reflective of Christ: Christ is exemplified by each thing being what it properly is. By perceiving life around us in this way we can glean Christ from all we can see and experience, and we are following Hopkins' discipleship. He witnesses 'These things, these things were here' – they are real, they existed, only the beholder is found 'wanting', is inadequate, yet is also left wanting more, but when seer really meets the thing seen, it can be the feeling 'heart' that makes the contact, that meets the 'instress' of life in what it perceives, and expresses the 'doing agree' that it is the grand 'Hurrah' of joy and delight in a life infused with the active energy and presence of God.

In this way Hopkins tries to 'bridge the gap' between ourselves and our world, ourselves and God. His words and imagery are what cause the spark to cross the gap in order to restore our perception through intensity of experience 'caught' in a brief but everlasting moment: 'I am like a slip of comet' - he is a worded parabola come to bridge the slender difference between two stars[211]. The idea of 'charge' or 'voltage'[212] connotes the reality of 'potential difference' where the current is 'inducted' or 'pulled' by another element. There has to be two elements present for current to move – cathode and anode, positive and negative, the 'seer' and the 'seen'. Hopkins believes that the seer has to meet the

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[208] No 34 p67
[209] cf also 'The Windhover', beginning 'I caught'.
[210] No 38 p70
[211] 'I am like a slip of comet' No 103 p147
[212] As expressed in 'God's Grandeur'

'stress'[213] of the thing seen, has to actively 'grasp'[214] or 'catch'[215] the energy emanating from it in order to fully experience its *haecceitas* or *quiddity*, and make the connection, close the gap between unlikeness. Michael Edwards asserts that the idea of 'catching' is central to the dynamics of Hopkins' world[216]. If we too did not have life force, we would not be able to 'induce' God through it. This renders life itself the space in the capacitor, the gap between the cathode and anode, the voltage or fiery principle of Yahwistic energy inducted through life, linking the seer with the seen, closing the circle, completing the 'O where it fails'[217]. This means that 'As kingfishers *catch* fire, dragonflies *draw* flame' [my emphasis] – and we in turn see by grasping; we catch, we draw, our action of perceiving completes the energy cycle. Hopkins' prophetic witness brings life alive to us through his words in order that we may see anew, re-experience, and be rejuvenated, made lively in order to perceive the liveliness of a world charged with God.

X

In this respect Hopkins' way of looking, his sight and his insightedness, are revelatory – his sight endows us with new vision[218]. Geoffrey Hartman believes that Hopkins' poetry is primarily an 'expression of sense experience' and should be interpreted as such, for the 'act of sight' is above all a moral responsibility[219]. 'To Oxford'[220] relies on idiosyncratic eyes for expression of the town's personality and character by way of an evocation of its architecture. The special 'visual compulsion' of the 'Just seen' is what Hopkins wishes to pass on, not the 'other eyes' common to his 'every peer'. Hopkins emphasises this: 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot'[221]: a hard thing to undo the 'knot' of sight, for when 'The rainbow shines', it does so 'only in the thought/Of him that looks'. Hopkins is saying that we see only by our eyes but it is our perception that elucidates what we see: sight is the Gordian knot which we must cut and he emphasises that every eye perceives differently: 'many standing round a waterfall/See one bow each, yet not the same to all'. This occurs

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[213] Hopkins believed in the force of 'stress'. In a Notebook entry on Parmenides he comments that if there existed 'no bridge, no stem of stress between us and things to bear us out and carry the mind over ... we might not and could not say 'Blood is red'' Humphry House. Ed. The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins. London: Oxford University Press, 1937. p98; J Hillis Miller asserts that the perception of the instress in natural objects is contingent on something in the observer: 'Only if the beholder is able to return stress for stress will the moment of knowledge, the moment of the coalescence of subject and object, take place' J Hillis Miller. 'The Creation of the Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins'. Journal of English Literary History. ELH XXII (1955) 293-319. p304

[214] 'Grasp God throned behind', 'The Wreck' s32

[215] 'I caught this morning', 'The Windhover'

[216] Michael Edwards. Poetry and Possibility. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988. p100

[217] 'In the Valley of the Elwy'

[218] Hopkins comments in a letter to Patmore: CLXXXVII May 6, 1888 from Milltown Park, Dublin: '... I suppose it is the rightness or clearness or clearsightedness of the seeing that is the quality, for surely seeing is an act ...' Abbott (1956) p389

[219] Geoffrey H Hartman. The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954. p53

[220] No 12 p21

[221] No 91 p129

because each stance or angle of looking is different, for each seer is a 'hand's breadth further than the next'; relative position, angle of sight, way of looking, is different in each case therefore one's 'looking' can only be truly unique. Because no-one looks at an object from the same perspective, reality truly is in the eye of the beholder, 'For who makes rainbows by invention?'.

The 'text' for what we see, the 'words' which are allocated to explain and elucidate, will also be correspondingly unique, thus 'The sun on falling waters writes the text'. The light glancing off moving water will 'say' different things to different people, each of whom will have a different 'text' or 'explanation' for that seeing event. Hopkins indicates that his own sight is unique, for 'None besides me this bye-ways beauty try' and he explains that he is trying to penetrate beauty in order to find out what it, in itself, is[222] and he does this by disclosing its uniqueness[223] and he is doing so all alone, that he 'may drink that ecstacy/Which to pure souls alone may be'[224]. He sees this activity as making him a 'suitor' to the world who wants the one peculiar vision of his own 'pleasured eye', and who sets it to pen in order to hold the moment of perception and make it immortal[225]. Hopkins is both witness and disciple in this praise. Through his revelatory vision his words attempt to unlock the wonder of the commonplace, transfigure the material world by revealing the eternal Christological mystery buried within the apparently mundane quotidian.

Hopkins wrestles with his own seeing eyes: he cannot 'see' Dolben, for example, with his real eyes[226] so he must use the eyes of his memory[227] to recreate him. He can't however 'capture' Dolben by thinking, so he has to get the vision wrong by necessity, conceiving 'amiss'. This is failure of the 'sight' faculty – picture memory is not enough to retain the presence of someone sundered from the present, and hope to meet again is a vain thing, an unreachable 'far-off promise of a time to be'. Our eyes are only capable of being useful in the present, and memory ultimately fails us. Sight can also be made merely a dark glass by a prevailing *a priori* viewpoint. In 'Spring and Death' the viewer sees death within Spring instead of rejuvenation. The seer already has, due to prior experience of the seasonal cycle, foreknowledge of loss and this means that his sight is imprisoned within a prior

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[222] cf Andrew Marvell's use of the word in 'To His Coy Mistress', line 26ff: 'Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound/My echoing song; then worms shall try/That long-preserved virginity'. Norton Anthology I (1993) p1421

[223] 'This was the prized, the desirable sight, unsought, presented so easily' No 137 p176: 'Moonrise June 19, 1876'

[224] See 'Il Mystico' No 77 p111 lines 141-142

[225] His sight triggers his poetry: 'Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,/Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep/Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky' No 149 p185: 'Ashboughs'

[226] 'Where art thou friend, whom I shall never see' No 13 p22

[227] See No 117 p161 'Confirmed beauty will not bear a stress' for a discussion about memory affecting vision – having *a priori* eyes due to experience; and the ineffectiveness of the written word to successfully hold someone in place.

viewpoint: that if you look only for death, that is what you will see. Memory affects vision – it can bring aid to sight, it can prejudice sight, but also can bring peace to sight through forgetting (ie: seeing no longer)[228]. Experience determines beforehand what our sight will be: what we re-see is only what we have seen, we can see nothing freshly that is not already infected by our own past or 'event horizon'. This is what Hopkins seeks to fight against, to break down: our pre-conceived ideas, our habitual thinking patterns that merely result in a jaded and hardened continuity of sight patterns that render us blind.

XI

The revelation which Hopkins seeks to pass on to us is his vision of a world which contains 'God, three-numbered form'[229] which he wants to be 'adored among men'. He makes a distinction between each member of the Trinity[230] and his poems extol them as an interior 'pressure' or 'principle' similar to the fiery energy of Yahweh 'charging' all things, and this reveals Hopkins' insightedness that is revelatory of content rather than external form. There is a proliferation of 'I's' and 'me's' and 'my's' in his poetry, his different 'selves' testifying to different experiences of God. It is often difficult to distinguish which 'I' is speaking, but for the purposes of extracting meaning one accepts the testimony, the multiplicity of voices reflecting a multiplicity of experience. 'I gazed unhinder'd' might be the title for all Hopkins' events of seeing which each poem is but one illustration of. By seeing into the mind and heart of the speaker(s), we can come to analyse ourselves, because someone else's perception challenges our own. Hopkins' disclosures are revelatory of underlying currents, of content within form and are an imparting of vision of what lies beneath. Through challenging our perceptions and our preconceptions, Hopkins is commanding us to see differently. He uses his unique testimony to say 'this is how I see things', implicit within this question: 'How do you see

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[228] 'I ... rise and go about my works again/And, save by darting accidents, forget'. Here, 'no Winter cast/The happy leafing' – winter had no power to kill, and 'his science helps him not to look', a prior position helps him not to see, he has 'Barely a sigh' left 'to thought of hopes forgone', forgetting helps the pain, memory aids (and balms) sight. See 'The Beginning of the End' No 14 p23

[229] See 'The Wreck' stanza 9

[230] We can see the distinctions between each in 'The Wreck': *Yahweh* is present: ''Thou mastering me/God! giver of breath and bread' (stanza 1), 'Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung' (stanza 9), 'thou art above, thou Orion of light' (stanza 21), 'Ground of being, and granite of it: past all/Grasp God, throned behind' (stanza 32); *Christ* is present: 'his going in Galilee;/Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey' (stanza 7), 'Five! the finding and sake/And cipher of suffering Christ' (stanza 22), 'the Master,/Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head' (stanza 28), 'Our passion-plunged giant risen,/The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in the storm of his strides' (stanza 33); *The Holy Spirit* is present: 'Breathe, arch and original Breath ... Breathe, body of lovely Death' (stanza 25), 'No not uncomforted: lovely-felicitous Providence' (stanza 31), 'he is under the world's splendour and wonder,/His mystery must be instressed, stressed;/For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand' (stanza 5), 'Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver' (stanza 6). cf 'God's Grandeur' No 31 p66: 'the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings'. This image of the Holy Ghost 'brooding' is unsettling because of its 'double' meaning (tyger & lamb polarity): it connotes emotional 'smouldering' with the potential to blaze into purifying flames of anger and retribution: the 'charge' of the world 'will flame out'; yet also connotes the benignity of a bird brooding protectively over the world as it would its eggs; elsewhere the Holy Spirit: 'Comforter, where, where is your comforting?' No 65 p100 'No worst, there is none'. Hopkins' poetry 'selves' the different parts of the triune Godhead; see 'Summa' No 133 p172, first stanza.

things?' and by challenging us to ask this of ourselves he raises our self-awareness and re-presents the world to our sight. Such a revelatory mission is idealistic at heart.

'My prayers must meet a brazen heaven'[231] has many 'I's' and 'my's', each with a story to tell. They could be the utterance of one speaker with many experiences, or different speakers expressing a single experience. 'Scattering' is the main movement, an inability to gather and synchronise. 'Sin' is the underlying motif: inability, a costive straining bringing nothing to fruition. There is fragmentation of self, the 'warfare of the lips' denoting a real battling, the uncomfortable reality of a felt experience. This early poem corresponds to Hopkins' later poems, specifically 'Carrion Comfort'[232] with its emphasis on 'wrestling' with God and self, and desperation to flee; similarly 'I wake and feel'[233] with its multiplicity of 'I's', its inability, and its bitter 'taste'. These poems are self-revelatory, confessional pieces, but we are left to wonder which part of the self is experiencing, which part fighting, which part giving in, and which part really in control. Hopkins states: 'With witness I speak this'[234], asking for our belief in his authority to utter and to reveal. Yet his emotion, with which he asks us to engage, and which he takes such pains to accurately express, is so controlled and mastered through use of poetic technique and deliberate trope that it becomes like Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', in danger of being a synthetic anodyne, emotion of the heart being *controlled into* emotion of the mind[235]. However, the compulsion to wrestle with and master emotion through mastery of language is the point of Hopkins' vocations both poetic and religious. He has no option but to respond to his own self experiencing, and this process is one of self-revelation and one of revealing the world to us through his eyes.

Hopkins reveals his struggle with absence and presence in both his early and late poems – the Dublin sonnets did not spring out of the blue with no provenance. The issues, feelings, paradoxes with which Hopkins stuggled late-on in life were there from the beginning: 'Nondum'[236] is an emotional lament for a *Deus Absconditus* who is silent and absent within a cosmos that is perceived as being dreadful and vacant. In answer to this vacancy, it is paradoxically the same absent God that 'givest that sense beyond' and can dispel

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[231] No 18 p27
[232] No 64 p99
[233] No 67 p101
[234] 'I wake and feel' No 67 p101
[235] cf Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802): 'the emotion is *contemplated* till by a *species of reaction* the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, *kindred* to that which was before the subject of *contemplation*, is gradually produced, and does itself actually *exist in the mind* ... so that in *describing any passions whatsoever* ... the mind will upon the whole be in a *state of enjoyment*' [my emphasis] Romantic Poetry and Prose (1973) p608
[236] No 23 p32

doubts and dry tears. In 'Patience, hard thing!'[237], patience requires war, wounds and weariness, and the willingness is not here as it is in 'Nondum' to 'wait till morn eternal breaks'; here patience asks the individual to 'do without, take tosses, and obey' with blind obedience. Patience is negative; it can mask the ruins of a 'wrecked past purpose' and leave hearts to merely 'grate on themselves' and 'kill' to 'bruise them dearer', but in the face of a negative God, patience can be a positive answer. Between each of these poems lies 'The Wreck', a powerful revelation of a powerful God whose active presence is alive within the events of the world. This poem is revelatory of personal knowledge of God, a God that can be touched and felt. The passion[238] and the fear[239], of an individual response to God, and the mastery[240] of Deity are all set forth with the force of witness and authority; the underlying faith strong and resolute. Emotional revelation takes on a mantle of prophetic zeal, as the speaker sets out to show us how we ought to behave, by using the example of the sacrifice of human lives to God's will, the poem being to the 'happy memory' of five Franciscan nuns and their faith *in extremis*.

Over many poems we have personal testimony of revelation which comes from different voices, different 'I's' within the texts. The multiplicity of voices does not diminish the power of their message however, each poem being a unique effort at integrating the fractured or divided 'self' of the speaker, an effort at mastery over unmanageable division and a quest for unification of emotion and insightedness through utterance. The poems can be seen as voyages of self-discovery, as the speaker attempts to unify the fragmented parts of his being.

The ten sonnets[241] of celebration, a major element within his work, were written in 1877 when Hopkins was at St Beuno's College, North Wales, reading Theology. These celebratory poems reveal the poet's 'eye-view' of God working within man and the natural environment, and within Hopkins' corpus provide a balance to the later darkness of the Dublin sonnets. In terms of their witness to faith, the poetic voice is strong and sure-footed both within the controlled construction of external form and the insightedness expressed, *videlicet* the use of the seen testifying to the unseen, the real to the metaphysical, the 'charge' of God lying behind and within what we can actually see and touch for

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[237] No 68 p102
[238] 'And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress' (stanza 2)
[239] 'The frown of his face/Before me, the hurtle of hell/Behind' (stanza 3)
[240] 'I admire thee, master of the tides/Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;/The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides' (stanza 32)
[241] 'God's Grandeur'; 'The Starlight Night'; 'Spring'; 'In the Valley of the Elwy'; 'The Sea and the Skylark'; 'The Windhover'; 'Pied Beauty'; 'Hurrahing in Harvest'; 'The Caged Skylark'; 'The Lantern out of Doors'

ourselves[242]. These poems are an attempt to link the uniqueness within each person to the unique manifestations of nature, and in terms of their personal revelation of the poet as servant of God, they present us with a period of his life in faith when he was at his strongest in vision and voice, as close as he was possibly ever going to be to both a physical reality and a spiritually transcendent experience of his God[243]. 'As kingfishers catch fire' celebrates selfhood as a key to universal life, the 'fire' and 'flame' which upholds each unique life not only 'selves' that life but also connects with wider materiality: each mortal thing providing the union of power and object, connecting the seer with the seen, allowing us to touch God. Yet we ourselves are also upheld by the same fire, and become Christ, who shines from our 'ten thousand places', lovely in our limbs and eyes. God the son gathers all nature to himself, providing harmony and connection between things, yet within men helps them to 'justice', to uphold our 'goings', our willed movements, with moral beauty[244].

The didactic imperative of the Hopkins' voice within these celebratory poems comes through resolutely in 'The Starlight Night'[245]. He focusses on our experience of visual revelation: 'dim woods'; 'diamonds'; 'elves'-eyes'; 'grey lawns'; 'gold'; 'white'; 'flare'; 'doves' – all conjure specific colours and ideas, Hopkins appealing to our imagination of the impossible as well as to our knowledge of the real. However, it is not only what these things can do for us by rejuvenating our sight or stimulating our imagination that is crucial, but also what we can bring to them, what parts of ourselves we can offer – 'Prayer, patience, alms, vows' – all 'active' processes, as if our own outpouring of energy through 'doing' and thereby 'selving'[246] can reach across the divide and join the current so we can truly experience what we are an intrinsic part of. We gather nature (and God) to us when we reveal the world to ourselves with enthused eyes of the heart and spirit, recapturing an Adamic vision and perceiving Eden within reality. This is realignment of sight towards the supernatural, re-vivifying our perceptions to enable us to become one with the world and be lively partakers of its divine energy.

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[242] This gives a way *through* matter to the sacred, the 'sacred' perceived as being, selving, doing; and such perception is an active celebration of life just as the institution of the sacraments is a celebration of life (I Corin 11: 23-26): both instituting a 'doing' that is active of body yet celebratory of spirit – it is the action that all participate in that counts, not the host (medium) itself.

[243] This is rooted in a sacramental theology and a theophany denoting real transcendent experience: 'I kiss my hand/To the stars, lovely-asunder/Starlight, wafting him out of it … Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west … he is under the world's splendour and wonder … For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand' 'The Wreck' s5.

[244] '*myself* it speaks and spells,/Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*' – cf Letter to the Hebrews 10: 5ff: 'when Christ came into the world, he said, … a body you have prepared for me … 'See, God, I have come to do your will'"

[245] No 32 p66

[246] See 'Spring' where nature also 'selves': 'The glassy peartree leaves and blooms' (note the noun-turned-verb denoting active doing).

Hopkins gives us imperatives to revelation in 'Spring': 'Look ... look, look up ... look at ... Look, look: a May-mess ... Look! March bloom ...'[247]. He wants us to truly look and see: not the bland, mundane surface character of nature which we are used to and which dulls before our eyes, but the vibrancy of life ever-renewing, the *instress* of 'charge' that upholds all life. He reveals the underlying principle, the 'pressure' of God, 'A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning/In Eden garden' before we lost that paradise. He asks us to see, as if for the first time, and love, and honour, all of the beauty around us, not disfigure and destroy it, make all our makings 'break' down to our 'last dust, drain fast towards' our 'first slime'[248]. He commands us to 'Have, get'[249] before the vision cloy, before we cloud our own sight with 'sinning'. This is true spiritual revelation, testimony to behaviour, orientation, and the difference that insightedness can make to our perception of the world. We can redeem our sight if we only look anew and see differently.

XII

Hopkins' revelatory vision is communicated by way of well-wrought and mastered language that is effectively a poetry of rhetorical persuasion. Beauty for Hopkins means moral, inner beauty that comes from correct choices made and correct will 'strained'[250] to that choice. Thus:

> Beauty it may be is the meet of lines[251],
> Or careful-spaced sequences of sound,
> These rather are the arc where beauty shines,
> The temper'd soil where only her flower is found.[252]

Hopkins' didactic language is rhetorical and carefully crafted with moral beauty in mind. He wants his words to be the arc which links the thing seen, with the inner morality it represents[253]. Many times he uses the Petrarchan Sonnet, and although he describes states where he feels out of control[254], as we have seen, mastery over the poem means mastery

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[247] He repeats 'look' seven times, and there are sixteen exclamation marks, to emphasise what he wants us to do and with what force or stress he wants us to do it.
[248] 'The Sea and the Skylark'
[249] 'Spring'
[250] 'he/Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty' 'The Loss of the Eurydice' lines 77-78 No 41 p72
[251] Hopkins commented: 'Rhyme is useful not only as shewing the proportion of disagreement joined with agreement which the ear finds most pleasurable, but also as marking the points in a work of art (each stanza being considered as a work of art) where the *principle of beauty is to be strongly marked*' [my emphasis] 'On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue' from note-book dated 12 May 1865: House (1959) p101
[252] No 102 p143: Fragments of 'Floris in Italy' (iii)
[253] See also 'an ark for the listener', stanza 33 of 'The Wreck'
[254] ie: submerged and overtaken by uncontrolled and uncontrollable emotion, whether that be ecstasy of wonder at the natural world, regret at past sin and imperfection, pleas to God to be heard or for God to be present, or later expressions of nihilism - see variously: 'The Beginning of the End'; 'Myself unholy'; 'See how Spring opens'; 'Nondum'; 'The Wreck' stanzas 1, 2, 3, 9; 'The Starlight Night'; 'The Windhover'; 'The Leaden Echo'; 'Carrion Comfort'; 'No worst there is none'; 'I wake and feel'; 'Justus es'.

achieved over the emotion: 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!'[255], control having been regained through a structured and stylised response, resolution having been attained through the very process of writing: 'these last strands of man/In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;/Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be'[256]. Thus whilst Hopkins is expressing that he is overcome, by expressing it he has done the overcoming, just as, whilst he is expressing the absence of God by vocative expression to God[257], he has made God present again and is himself mastered: 'Thou mastering me/ God!'[258]. Thus, his tightly-knit and tightly-structured poetics is a poetics of mastery which imposes harmony from without by way of rhyme-scheme or sonnet form, or rules of stress and emphasis. Hopkins ensures strong rhythms prevail by using what he called 'sprung' rhythm, comprising emphatic stresses on first syllables to provide an underlying rhythmic beat beneath syllabic variability and inconstancy, ensuring both stability and continuity, and mirroring in sound terms the beat of the emotional heart, the beat of feet treading.

Hopkins' mastery of language is illustrated through his use of internal rhyme, use of compounds, neologisms; and his carefully controlled sound-effects of onomatopoeia, assonance, alliteration. He displays his mastery over syntax[259] which is often deliberately 'broken'[260] or inverted[261], and through his deliberate choice and placing of vocabulary[262].

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[255] 'The Windhover'
[256] 'Carrion Comfort'
[257] In terms of either plea: 'Let him easter in us, be a dayspring', or admiration: 'I admire thee, master of the tides' etc
[258] 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' stanza 1
[259] Often including **exclamations**: 'Is out with it! … Word last! … Gush!' ('The Wreck' s8), 'Christ our Sacrifice is made!' ('Barnfloor and Winepress'); **questions**: 'Who is this Moses?' ('A Soliloquy'), 'Is this made plain?' ('The Beginning of the End'); **commands**: 'Ye weary, come into the shade' ('Barnfloor and Winepress'), 'Pure fasted faces draw unto this feast' ('Easter Communion'), 'Here! creep,/Wretch' ('No worst, there is none'), 'past all/Grasp God, throned behind' ('The Wreck' s32), 'Look!' ('The Starlight Night'); **vocative direct speech**: 'O thou lord of life' ('Justus es'); 'Where art thou friend, whom I shall never see'; 'Complete thy creature dear O where it fails' ('In the Valley of the Elwy'); **asides to the reader**: 'Nor first from heaven (and few know this)' ('The Wreck' s6), 'What by your measure is the heaven of desire?' ('The Wreck' s26), 'O if we but knew what we do/When we delve or hew' ('Binsey Poplars'); **soliloquies**: 'I caught this morning morning's minion, king-/dom of daylight's dauphin' ('The Windhover'), 'who goes there?/I think; where from and bound, I wonder, where' ('The Lantern out of Doors'); **testimony**: 'I was under a roof here, I was at rest' ('The Wreck' s24), 'I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes' ('Hurrahing in Harvest'); **prayers**: 'Glory be to God for dappled things' ('Pied Beauty')
[260] 'The Wreck' s17: 'the deck/(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or/rolled'; s18: 'Ah, touched .. Are you! turned … Have you! make … Do you! – mother'. See also 'weary-/y' in "To seem the stranger'; 'smile/'s' in 'My own heart', 'king-/dom' in 'The Windhover'; further, the aposiopesis, the disintegration of sense in 'The Wreck' s28, also 'Only … O on that path' ('The Handsome Heart')
[261] 'None besides me this bye-ways beauty try' ('To Oxford'); see the tmesis in 'The Bugler's First Communion': 'And locks love ever in a lad!' also 'Those sweet hopes quell whose least me quickenings lift'; 'Only what word/Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban/Bars or hell's spell thwarts' ("To seem the stranger"); 'Brim, in a flash, full!' ('The Wreck' s8); 'his wind- lilylocks –laced' ('Harry Ploughman').
[262] Including **neologisms**: 'louched' ('Ribblesdale'), 'cragiron' meaning 'plough' in 'Harry Ploughman', 'wilful-wavier/Meal-drift' ('Hurrahing in Harvest'), 'sloggering' (stanza 19 'The Wreck'), 'forefalls' 'The Eurydice'; and **portmanteau** coinages such as 'twindles' combining 'twists' and 'twitches' and 'dwindle' in 'Inversnaid'; as well as **archaic** expressions: 'my pleasaunce' ('To Oxford'), 'As erst upon chaotic floods' ('Nondum'), 'thou … wert the one fair daughter' ('Ad Mariam'), 'thou … Didst fettle' ('Felix Randal'), 'brandle' ('The Bugler's First Communion'), 'barrowy': bearwe, beran, OE 'to bear', also 'thew': theaw, OE 'manner, trait, custom' ('Harry Ploughman'), 'brinded' early form of 'brindled' in 'Pied Beauty', 'bone-house' in 'The Caged Skylark' (cf OE ban-hus: Beowulf line 2508); also **vernacular** used in Lancashire or Wales etc: 'wuthering' in 'Henry Purcell: 'a Northcountry word for the noise and rush of wind' Abbott Letters to Bridges (1935) p83; 'fashed': Scottish ('The Golden Echo'), 'Disremembering': Irish ('Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'), 'voel': Welsh ('The Wreck') ; and **compound words**, often hyphenated: 'dappled-with-damson' ('The Wreck' s5), 'brown-as-dawning-skinned' ('The Eurydice'), often not: 'yestertempest', 'shadowtackle',

He used other techniques to intensify and 'charge' his poetry[263], the welsh *cynghanedd* or consonant-chime being one[264]; he adds –le to words[265], -y[266] to jog our attention and refresh our experience of language. All tropes combine to make a deliberate rhetoric of persuasion, whether arguing for the beauty of the world and the presence of God, or arguing himself out of an emotional or spiritual predicament - mastery is the key. Hopkins also attempts to master us as readers by controlling our vision, the way we look at things; he even attempts to control the way we read his words, having left behind directions for voice stress and emphasis.

The purpose of Hopkins' rhetorical didacticism is to effect change, and he does this by 'shaking' and 'unsetting' our 'mortiсed metaphors'[267], our locked sight. He wants to jolt us out of complacency and a set way of looking at the world, by using words unusually placed, rhythms unusually stressed, all of his techniques an attempt to 'break' the complacency of the reader and, through discontinuity, allow freshness and immediacy to surface. Hopkins achieves this through use of rhetorical technique, just as the prophets did with their 'therefore' *volta*, their syntactic logic of 'like … so' constructions. The world is 'charged' with the 'grandeur' of God[268]: Hopkins makes a statement[269] then proceeds to 'explain' what he means by way of similes – it will 'flame out' like shining from shook foil; it also 'gathers to a greatness' like the 'ooze of oil/Crushed'. He wants us to envision the images he presents[270], as he attempts to 're-present' the world to our eyes and heart. He also re-presents humanity's actions, counterpointing the 'actions' of immanent Deity, in a way that reveals what he thinks of what we do: 'rod', 'trod', 'trade', 'toil' all in close proximity, the consonant and assonance 'chime' rub against one another and are

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'footfretted', 'rutpeel' in 'Heraclitean Fire'; expressions used in various 'professions' such as the **chivalric**: 'fealty' ('To Oxford'), 'morning's minion', 'daylight's dauphin', 'O my chevalier' ('The Windhover'), the **agrarian**: 'plough down sillion' ('The Windhover'); he uses **negatives** a great deal: 'unendear' ('To Oxford') 'unchancelling' ('The Wreck' s21) 'unselve' ('Binsey Poplars').

[263] For example: 'The ear in milk, lush the sash,/And crush-silk poppies aflash,/The blood-gush blade-gash/Flame-rash rudred/Bud shelling or broad-shed' No 138 p176: 'The Woodlark'

[264] See 'rash-fresh' in 'The Sea and the Skylark', also 'Trench – right … tide … ramps against', 'Left hand, off land', 'In crisps of curl', 'wild winch whirl', 'pour/And pelt', 'ring right out' etc.

[265] See 'nursle' 'Henry Purcell'

[266] 'dank-ytressed trees' line 106, 'Il Mystico'

[267] See No 101 p142: 'Yes for a time they held as well/Together, as the criss-cross'd shelly cup/Sucks close the acorn; as the hand and glove;/As water moulded to the duct it runs in;/As keel locks close to kelson – Let me now/Jolt/Shake and unset your mortiсed metaphors./The hand draws off the glove; the acorn-cup/Drops the fruit out; the duct runs dry or breaks;/The stranded keel and kelson warp apart'. The second stanza undoes the first as the various images split apart what before was close-locked. This is a powerful allegory for Hopkins' intent – he wishes to upset previously held knowledge of language leading to habitual sight and expression which becomes both jaded and hardened so that we do not see what we are looking at, and are so used to certain modes of expression that language itself is rendered eunuch. He aims to fracture with rhetoric which inculcates discontinuity in order that something new and refreshing can rise.

[268] 'God's Grandeur' No 31 p66

[269] A statement that holds belief as well as a new way of seeing, a personal testament to his own vision that he attempts to pass on in the hope that we will be able to 'see' through his eyes and come to new understanding of the world and God's activity within it. It is an attempt to convert, to bring to light that which is hidden.

[270] Hopkins states: 'I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel … Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and creasings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too' Abbott Letters to Bridges (1935) p169; also quoted in Gardner (1967) notes p264

highlighted and emphasised thereby. Similarly the rhymes of 'seared', 'bleared', 'smeared', 'wears', 'shares', 'bare' are linked together like beads and help progress the argument, the 'chiming' of one against the other keeping the poem tightly-knit and controlled.

As to structure then, the intellectual sense of the octave in 'God's Grandeur' is to provide us with descriptions of God's active presence in the world as a real phenomenon, followed by a *caesura* 'question' mid way, a *volta* which asks why other people, 'men' do not 'reck'[271] his rod – before the question is answered for us: a plea for us to follow his logical conclusion: it is man's innate behaviour, choices over generations, that actively destroy the world without and render insensate the world within. All seems lost, and the octave closes on a bad note, but the sestet begins in incredulity and is full of hope: 'And, for all this' there is a still perennial 'spring' in nature, things exist beyond the range and scope of man to destroy, 'morning ... springs' because of the Holy Ghost, the spiritual presence of God in the world. Renewal comes even when things seem blackest; there is always a redemptive force that will militate against and transform the shoddy things of man so that man, his nature, his doings, can be rejuvenated.

The form of the poem, the Petrarchan sonnet, means that the rhyme scheme (internal[272], end-stopped[273], enjambement[274]), the rhythm and the sense are tightly mastered, for there is an argument taking place. Hopkins is arguing for God and against Man (as God's representative) but arguing for Man also (as man's representative) because of a belief in an immanent and transcendent God, and a belief that man may be fallen, may always be falling, yet because of the love of God, will continually be redeemed. Redemption is a cyclic event: 'the last lights off the black West' go, only for 'morning, at the brown brink eastward' to spring. The poem is circular: the 'bright wings' at the end being transformed into the 're-charging' of God's grandeur within the world[275]. Within the tightness of the construction the words are packed to hold maximum force. We have seen above the correspondences that inhere, the poem being a carefully-constructed criss-cross matrix of sounds which should be read aloud, as Hopkins always claimed his poetry should be. The sound links with the sense rendering the poem didactic of religious belief and argument, in order that faith might be kindled and sight rejuvenated in someone, somewhere. This is

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[271] 'reck' in the sense of to count as important, also 'a force to be reckoned with'.
[272] 'seared', 'bleared' etc
[273] 'God', 'foil', 'oil', 'rod' etc
[274] 'toil;/And wears', 'soil/Is bare'
[275] Compare the eschatological and redeeming fire upon the waters in Revelation that purifies and rejuvenates, the water changing back into the still darkness of the water of Genesis for the cyclic process to begin again. See Rev 19:20; 20:10; 20:14-15; 21:7-8; 22;1. See Gen: 1:2; 1:6, 9.

prophetic rhetoric: the endeavour to master your audience, persuade of your point of view by constructing your words for maximum impact.

XIII

Hopkins' religious vocation, comprising faithfulness and cost, is embedded in his belief in the incarnation and in his Scotist Christological vision of the world. 'New Readings'[276] gives Christ as the exemplar of faithfulness and its cost, as the suffering servant he is the one who obeyed the call to be what he had to be: a sacrifice from which fruit could grow. Christ chose (and was chosen for) a destiny of sacrifice, but Isaiah and Jeremiah before him, as paradigms, paved the way, and Hopkins recognised that within call to vocation resided suffering[277]. He also recognised, and this poem testifies to, the fact that suffering is not in vain[278].

Hopkins' choice of vocation, to be a priest within the Jesuit Order of St Ignatius[279], was his way of 'selving', he wanted to be by doing, and chose active service as a footsoldier on behalf of his God[280]. This was also Hopkins' way of being of wider service to humanity. Hopkins is Christ-like in that he chose a life of both sacrifice, and through that, praise[281], as he endeavoured to be an exemplar, himself a sacramental sign of the belief that he wished to pass on to others: 'Hark, hearer, hear what I do; lend a thought now, make believe'[282]. He expressed his interest in such a vocation early on in 'Heaven-Haven'[283], a desire to be away from and to live on the edge of a society where life is competitive and difficult, where demanding choices and endeavour lie, and to be instead in a place where peace reigns and spiritual bliss and communion is possible. His spiritual geography of

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[276] No 7 p18

[277] Not only personal suffering, but being close to the suffering of others. 'Felix Randal' shows Hopkins in his ministry, the human contact inherent within vocation an important two-way relationship.

[278] See Jeremiah 15:19-21: 'If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you ... I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you ... I will deliver you ... and redeem you'. This is God's answer to Jeremiah's complaint about his sufferings (Jer 15: 10-18)

[279] This choice itself is prophetic in that the exclusivity and cloistered nature of monasticism stands as a protest against the world. Antony, the founding father of the monastic movement is alleged to have said: 'A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us''. Williams (1979) Ch 5

[280] See the principle of active service within an Order: 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' No 73 p106 where 'years and years by of world without event' happen while 'Alfonso watched the door'. Based on a societal standard the man apparently 'did nothing' but by the standards of his Order he won an honourable war of obedience that began to be waged the moment he was accepted as a Novice, a war between 'elective' and 'affective' will, between consolation and desolation, good and evil, striving for the 'habit of perfection' within a calling to be Christ's disciple. This man's experience of servitude would have struck a chord with Hopkins who often felt futile and useless within his vocation. cf also Hopkins' comments: 'The King's call is to those directly who have already committed themselves to something, are equites, knights, follow the profession of arms and having been knighted are bound by allegiance, fealty, loyalty, chivalry, knighthood ... to live up to a standard of courage above the civilian and even above the private soldier. And an adult Christian is such ...' Devlin (1959) p163

[281] Within the idea of sacrifice is *sacrum facere* – to make sacred, involving gift-giving.

[282] No 159 p197: 'Epithalamion'

[283] No 9 p19

place is metaphysical: 'springs', 'fields', 'lilies blowing', 'the green swell', 'the havens dumb' – all feel Elysian and Edenic. It is expressive of an idealistic view of a vocation which Hopkins in 1864 knew little about; he wrote this poem two years before his conversion to Catholicism and four years before he entered the novitiate at Manresa House, Roehampton, to begin his nine years' training for the priesthood. But already it shows the capacity for choice and belief (however naïve) and is expressive of active faith: 'I have asked to be'.

The poem shows a mistaken belief that such a vocation would be calm and peaceful. On the contrary, as his experience would later prove, the reality of such a life comprises alienation (even from other members of the Order)[284], exile, edge and marginalisation. It was also a life of hard work and privation, to the extent that Hopkins' physical and mental health would always suffer and his nerves would be strained to breaking point. Hopkins chose a vocation within which endurance is the key quality required, and the practice of perseverance in the face of futility and worthlessness, doggedness in the face of despair and resignation[285]. Hopkins found himself in a place where 'wars are rife'[286], his being idle except for fighting his own self and situation. He found himself to be a 'stranger' in his later vocation, his 'brothers and sisters' sundered from him, and far from having had peace blossom because of his choice, it caused 'parting, sword and strife'. He was away from his family, away from England, and was in a country (Ireland) where he did not agree with the prevailing political topography[287], which was supported by the Catholic contingent, but not Hopkins. He was not in the calm haven he had imagined as a young man.

In Lent of 1865 when Hopkins was aged 20 and still at Oxford, he wrote 'Easter Communion'. This poem is primarily an evocation of the physical suffering through self-harm which can be perpetrated in favour of a higher ideal, an attempt to make a sacrament of the physical body. It shows the deliberate sacrifice of the body in order to attain

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[284] In a letter to Bridges Hopkins comments: LXXIII Apr 27, 1881 from 8 Salisbury Street, Liverpool: 'Alas, I have heard so much about and suffered so much for and in fact been so completely ruined for life by my alleged singularities that they are a sore subject' Abbott (1935) p126

[285] From his Retreat Notes for Jan 1, 1888 Hopkins comments: 'The question is how I advance the side I serve on. Outwardly I often think I am employed to do what is of little or no use', and continues: 'I was continuing this train of thought this evening when I began to enter on that course of loathing and hopelessness which I have so often felt before, which made me fear madness ...' Devlin (1959) pp261-2

[286] No 66 p101: 'To seem the stranger', third of the Dublin sonnets

[287] cf his famous quote: 'I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third/Remove' – alienated and feeling like a stranger to himself, to others, and to the vocation he chose years before 'since (seems) I kissed the rod' so that his 'grain' might lie 'sheer and clear' see No 64 p99 'Carrion Comfort'; note White's comment with regard to Home Rule: "Hopkins' patriotic instincts were on the side of conservative English policies, against Gladstone and Parnell. His political sympathies should have been with the Protestant Unionists ... but as he was a Catholic Hopkins could belong to neither camp' Norman White. Hopkins: A Literary Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. p366

spiritual communion: God comes in 'sweetness'[288] to 'Lenten lips' through fasting and the partaking of Mass. There is a reference to self-flagellation: 'You striped in secret with breath-taking whips'[289], and a comparison made with the self-sacrifice of Christ, the welts on the back compared to Christ's whipping before he was crucified. There is a deliberate juxtaposition between 'spiritual' garments and 'bodily' garments[290], the latter referenced by 'serged' and 'sackcloth' - the real and 'ever-fretting shirt of punishment'; the 'spiritual' garment which can be attained through deliberate self-harm is 'oil of gladness' and 'myrrhy[291]-threaded golden folds of ease'.

The portrait painted is one of physical privation, but paradoxically what emanates from this is God's presence in 'sweetness', empathy for Christ's suffering[292]; and the privations make one 'Breathe Easter' - be resurrected from an old life to a new, dying to sin and being reborn to virtue. This is all carried out within a vocation of 'fellowship': in concert with others you are enacting rites that bring you closer to your God. 'Easter Communion' was to prove prophetic of Hopkins' later struggle for faith, his experience of spiritual desolation within the Jesuit order which was largely founded upon his personal inner war of body versus spirit. The pains he bore, and his physical dis-ease in later life were prefigured within this imagined scenario, Hopkins aware even in 1865 that to choose such a vocation was to choose suffering, both physical and mental. 'The Beginning of the End'[293] also expresses ideas of physical privation in terms of restitution from sin: 'I cease the mourning and the abject fast,/And rise and go about my works again/And, save by darting accidents, forget'. Mourning and fasting, 'abject' because penitential, have interrupted the normal routine of life, but once enough privation has been endured and the sinner feels he has made restitution, with easier heart he can go about his business again: '*less* is heavens higher', he ascends to heaven the more he denies himself. The poem describes an agony of mind and heart which prefigures the late Dublin sonnets where the agony is more anguished and less redeemable.

The idea of vocation, and of Christ-like self-sacrifice within it, is also expressed in 'The Wreck'. In stanzas 17 and 19, the tall nun rises to 'breast' (fight/face) the 'babble' of terrified voices, the chaos, fear and death. She towers amid the 'tumult', rising like a

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[288] cf other references to 'eating' the words of God which are 'sweet' to the tongue: see Ezekiel 3:1-3 and Rev 10:8-11.
[289] There is evidence that Hopkins practised this from an early age, throughout the duration of his life.
[290] cf Blake 'To Tirzah'
[291] With the inherent reminder of the gift of 'myrrh' which the wise men brought from the East to the newly-born Christ-child (Matthew 2:9-12) with the corollary here of being 'new-born' at Easter time for the faithful.
[292] This is the hope that within the quotidian, the small and the synchronic, one can be *imitatio Christi* and partake of his eternal, diachronic, macrocosmic passion.
[293] No 14 p23; primarily a poem of passion (meaning both great emotion and pain) for 'poor love's failure', but also a penitential poem admitting of personal sin and restitution.

prophetess above all the other people both physically and metaphysically, lion-like (betokening courage as well as strength), roaring-out her words with a virginal tongue that tolls like a bell of celebration as well as a calling of the faithful[294]. She calls her 'master' whom she serves, Christ, but the 'one thing' that she sees in the weather is the hand of Yahweh, for she knows it is he who controls nature and all worldly events. Thus she rears herself to 'divine ears' in order that she may be heard beyond the mortal moment within the immortal realm. She becomes the paradigm for Christ, Isaiah, Jeremiah, a re-duplication of sacrifice, the 'suffering servant' who has been called by the will of God to extremity. The poet has also been 'called' to this, for the 'master' is both 'her master and mine'. The nun and the poet have only 'one fetch' in them: one purpose, effort, alignment, vocation, that can face life's storms. Stanza 19 is an evocation of vocation enacted *in extremis*, of belief that remains unrenounced even in the most adverse circumstance, and is paradigmatic of the scourge and the sorrow that tests faith. The paradigm of Christ is re-enacted by both. The ideal of martyrdom within vocation is also present in stanzas 20-23; the nuns were hated for their religion and cast out of Germany because of it. Hopkins mixes 'real' and 'mythical' people in these stanzas. A real wreck becomes the mythical event that evokes the presence of Yahweh as well as Christ. Martyrdom on earth is the 'Lovescape crucified' that becomes merely the gateway to a 'seraph-arrival' – an eternal and ongoing resurrection that nullifies the pain of the 'fallen' quotidian.

Sacrifice in Hopkins is the ideal of self-sacrifice for a greater cause[295], an ideal that can cause one's own destruction[296]. He uses St Dorothea as a paradigm: 'Lines for a Picture of St Dorothea'[297] shows belief in action: understanding the transitory nature of the body, the beauty of grace and faith, the bitterness of pain and death, the reward of eternal life. The writ served her was God's decree[298], a judgement having been made in an immortal 'court' and delivered to her unseen. She may have 'waned into the world of light' but her deed remains, it makes its own market in the world and the poet's eyes hold it fast before ours:

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[294] Her tongue 'virginal' for it has never spoken like this before, also virginal betokening her sexuality and purity, it 'tells' as in 'telling' others something, but also the word 'told' connoting the 'tolling' of a bell.

[295] The word 'sacrifice' connotes gift, a 'handing-over' to God, thus the ideal is not necessarily one of pain and desolation.

[296] One of the costs is being on life's 'edge', living an alienated and marginalised life which renders the individual lost and separated from previous ties. Such displacement has the power to undermine confidence, self-belief, and can result in loneliness and isolation. cf Jeremiah: 'I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail' Jer 15: 17-18. cf 'To seem the stranger' No 66 p101: 'To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life/Among strangers. Father and mother dear,/Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near/And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife'. Hopkins in Ireland was separated from family and England by country, religion, language, politics, and separated from people and society generally by way of his vocation and practices. These displacements mean that he 'hoards unheard' and is 'Heard unheeded', even his poetry seems futile and useless, and all that he does is 'a lonely began' for nothing ends his situation, and he can bring nothing he starts to culmination. Hopkins was under 'dark heaven's baffling ban', lonely and isolated, uncertain in his choices and unsure of his faith.

[297] No 25 p35

[298] cf 'God's most deep decree/Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me' No 67 p101: 'I wake and feel'

'the rinds and bright/Remainder of a miracle'. More martyrs will undo the warp and woof of this twisted world because they follow her example. Her example is testified to by the example of the poem, the idea of sacrifice making its mark in the poetic market of the world where even words can be bought and sold, but by comparison such faith and self-sacrifice is beyond price.

Hopkins viewed the example of Christ's sacrifice as a way to undo the ways of the world, to challenge and change and thereby redeem fallen humanity. Hopkins consistently made reference to exemplars of faithfulness, his own faithfulness and the personal cost involved attested to by the six sonnets written in Dublin in 1885. In these poems, representing his own and others' experience, he passes on sight, perception, understanding, and willingness-to-action taken, in order to teach. At the same time as we lose both him and Dorothea from our sight, they speak louder to us by their worded actions than they could when they were alive: 'Sphered[299] so fast, sweet soul? – We see/Fruit nor flower nor Dorothy', but we see what she did.

Hopkins' experience of vocation is one that is bound up with the single and unrepeatable moment: his faithfulness to his insighted vision articulated by 'I caught this morning'[300] which brings us with him into the moment when he caught, making the experience real and immediate. The unrepeatable moment is eternally in the present, the historical present of Yahweh, the poet performing an *anamnesis* where we can also 'catch' the same glimpse Hopkins had. His faithful testimony has the authority of lived experience, of insighted perception. This poem is important with respect to a vocation of servitude, Hopkins himself is 'minion' (serf, menial) to the new day, his heart doubly removed: hidden within his body and hidden within his vocation. His vocation was one of displacement from everyday life and orientation towards an ever-receding ideal: the horizon one can see but never reach. Hopkins was aligned with an 'older' retrograde God: the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible. Hopkins' 'hidden heart' was removed from an age that disclaimed God, but with contemporary faith in Christ diminishing in the face of societal change and human technological advancement, Hopkins removed himself from the Protestant faith to a more ancient Christian faith. He also removed himself from the Victorian age where he was in many respects in exile from its clutter, its sense of outward ostentation, its etiquette and formality, and chose to dive beneath its surface values to reach an aestheticism as well as an ascetic ideal. Hopkins lived a pared-down life of *ascesis* that breathed beneath the personality of the age and was in touch with more ancient values and the continuity of

[299] 'completed', 'joined', 'made whole'.
[300] 'The Windhover' No 36 p69

historical religion. All aspects of his life were engaged in displacement from immediate society: to solitude, to alienation, to edge-experience and marginalisation; and this despite the fact that he worked with many people within many different parishes, his austere life was above all aimed at maintaining an integrity of silence and singularity. Hopkins, as Thomas did, understood that God can be alive and crackling like charged voltage when interaction occurs: interaction with other people, personal engagement with the world, directed energy and willed endeavour in action, but they knew that when the individual withdraws to silence and the single room God can recede alarmingly and leave only vacancy and silence behind.

The God which Hopkins served is often portrayed in his poetics as the Hebrew Bible God Yahweh – one who is elemental, wrathful, vengeful[301], a purifying force, yet also compassionate, kind, caring[302]. Hopkins' God comprises the Blakean qualities of both 'tyger' and 'lamb', one who is 'lightning and love' as well as 'winter and warm'[303]. Hopkins presents Yahweh as the driving principle of fiery energy coursing through all life, whereas Christ is the dove: controlled passivity, the personification of docile acceptance of Yahweh's decrees, the one who accepts suffering and death for the greater good. Hopkins makes distinction between these opposing presentations of Deity in 'The Windhover' where the emphasis is on chivalry and service. Falconry was the sport of Kings, as was horsemanship, and Hopkins plays with these ideas, recalling St Ignatius of Loyola. Hopkins' own spiritual resolution within his vocation - the 'sheer plod' of his days as footsoldier of the Lord - enabled him to 'buckle on' his faith like a breastplate just as he was able to 'join' or 'buckle' the swinging flight of a bird of prey to his eyes and through them to his soul. He asks us to do likewise: to join with his sight and 'see' in the bird divine energy, 'see' Hopkins' own vocation as humble solider elucidated by being 'minion' to a divine King.

XIV

The 'poor collapsing frame'[304] of humanity is Hopkins' burden within his chosen vocation and endeavour, not only personally felt through a sense of failure and ineffectuality within his own mission, but also in the sense of his care for and his efforts on behalf of a wider community. He felt responsible for the people before God. He was not terribly gifted

[301] see stanza 1 of 'The Wreck' for God's mastery and the dread he instils; his 'lightning' and 'lashed rod' of chastisement in stanza 2; his 'dark descending' in 9; God's 'cold' in 17 which kills by various means etc
[302] see stanza 33 of 'The Wreck' for Yahweh's qualities of 'mercy' and 'compassion'; he is a 'vein' for the visiting of those who are 'past-prayer', an injection of blood, an infusion of energy.
[303] 'The Wreck' s9
[304] 'The Escorial' s3 No 1 p3

within his vocation, his skills as preacher left much to be desired[305], he could not oratorically connect with his parishioners, his cast of mind being theologically intellectual and distanced from their everyday life: 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now ... but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue'[306]. He also gained no distinction within his Order. His true oratorical preaching gift lay within his poetry which comprised (and managed to successfully communicate) his perception of a vibrant and beautiful world that contained the living and immanent presence of God. The strength and muscularity of his strenuously compacted poetics explodes with a bardic force which Hopkins could not manage in the pulpit[307]. It is this poetics of prophecy which becomes the rhetorical outlet for his didactic vision – Hopkins' poetry which we read from a page has energetic oral force. He paid a personal price for this gift of utterance however, which was paradoxically stimulated by an environment and regime that steadily ate away at his spiritual and physical strength: 'although/Self-sentenced, still/I keep my trust'[308]. The idea of gift and concomitant burden is represented by the idea of 'wreck' and 'wreckage'[309] which elucidate Hopkins' feelings of futility, waste and disappointment[310], and these feature heavily within his poetry as does the idea of struggling and wrestling with the very God on whose behalf he worked so fervently and with so little recognisable reward.

'The Caged Skylark'[311] is informative with respect to this idea of burden and gift within vocation. Birds and flight, with their concomitant connotations of both spiritual and physical freedom re-occur within Hopkins' poetry[312]. This poem is a representative

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[305] cf part of a sermon delivered at Bedford Leigh near Manchester for Sunday evening Nov 23, 1879: 'Christ was perfect man ... I leave it to you, brethren, then to picture him, in whom the fulness of the godhead dwelt bodily, in his bearing how majestic, how strong and yet how lovely and lissome in his limbs, in his look how earnest, grave but kind. In his Passion all this strength was spent, this lissomness crippled, this beauty wrecked, this majesty beaten down' Devlin (1959) p36

[306] Exodus 4: 10; cf Jeremiah: 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak' (1: 6)

[307] Hopkins comments in a letter to Bridges: XXXVII Aug 21, 1877 from St Beuno's, St Asaph: 'My verse is less to be read than heard, as I have told you before; it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so' Abbott (1935) p46; also letter CXLIII Dec 11, 1886 from Univ College, Dublin: '... remember what applies to all my verse, that it is, as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on' Abbott (1935) p246

[308] See No 127 p169: 'Trees by their yield'

[309] The whole idea of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is one of foundering, stress, wreck, waste, and ruin, acceptance of self-sacrifice and martyrdom, submission to the will of God, an uncomfortable (and unequal) relationship with the Divine; see also his comment: 'Our ruins of wrecked past purpose' in 'Patience, hard thing!' No 68 p102. See also: 'Nor word now of success:/All is from wreck, here, there, to rescue one -/Work which to see scarce so much as begun/Makes welcome death, does dear (endear) forgetfulness' No 150 p186: 'The times are nightfall'; further: 'Past, the Past, no more be seen!' No 129 p170: 'Moonless darkness stands between'

[310] In many respects, through many years of practising the Spiritual Exercises, Hopkins would have been conditioned towards such feelings. One of the 'Additional Practices' No 78 (6) of the Exercises encourages: 'I should not try to think of agreeable or happy things such as the glory of Heaven, the Resurrection and the like. Joyful or happy thoughts get in the way of feelings of pain, sorrow or grief for our sins. I must bear in mind that I am looking for sorrow and painful feelings, so that I ought rather to think of death and judgement'; No 79 (7) continues: 'For the same reason, I should shut out all light, keeping shutters and doors closed whilst I am in my room, except when I have to read or take my meals'; No 80 (8): 'I should not laugh or say anything to cause laughter' Corbishley (1973) pp38-39

[311] No 39 p70

[312] See for example: 'Peace' No 51 p85 which is conceived as a 'wild wooddove, shy wings shut' which Hopkins cannot make 'roaming end' and 'under be my boughs'. Peace is seen as a circling and active bird which is unable to be caught, connoting agitation and the keynote of an unquiet mind. The only peace he gets is 'piecemeal peace' which is 'poor' and

leitmotiv for the idea of imprisonment[313], the spirit caged within a physical body[314], which is in turn caged within a chosen vocation with its 'enclosing' routine[315] and wider, the surrounding enclosure of an restraining physical environment[316] divorced from the outside world. Such a 'prison' of body, mind and spirit can also however provide stability and a 'rock' against which one can steady the self. Here, paradoxically, the gift of words can flourish: 'Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells'[317]. The gift of life becomes the burden of life only when constriction and stultification rule its days: the 'sheer plod'[318] and 'trod', the 'soil' and 'toil'[319], and Hopkins chose such a burden. His chosen state and vocation, his 'poor low stage'[320], nevertheless allowed him to 'sing' even as a caged bird can sing, yet the seven 'fallow' writing years beginning in 1868 when he entered the Society of Jesus were not ended until 1875 when Hopkins was 31 and he broke his silence with 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'. It is argued that his idiosyncratic 'voice' sprung sure and fully formed at this point, but it would not have been so had Hopkins not served his apprenticeship beforehand, both poetically since 1860 and religiously in his early years at Oxford. 'The Wreck' springs from what went before, and gave Hopkins the platform he needed for his mature voice.

The soul may feel like a caged bird, but it doesn't have to be one, and we can see Hopkins continually striving to transcend the physical conditions, restrictions, and limitations of his life. He consistently struggles to turn what appears to be darkness and dearth into some kind of light; to turn physical restraint into stability within the spiritual freedom and sustenance he found in God: 'He hath abolished'[321] turns thirst into 'merciful dew' and the place where he will 'meet' the Lord will not be on the physical plane but on the spiritual, in 'heavenly vales'. 'Myself unholy'[322] tries to tear self from self in order that an old self can be done away with and a new self live, by way of spirit striving to transcend bodily fault (sin). These poems are discursive and attend to the paradox of freedom and stability within imprisonment or limitation, and are concerned with act through experience, but *a*

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always where 'wars are rife' No 66 p101: 'To seem the stranger', no peace at all. He blames the Lord for 'reaving' his peace, robbing him of it, the word 'reeve' also having nautical connotations of 'to rope together' or 'gather' (cf 'The Wreck' s12 p55). Even when patience turns into peace, it 'comes with work to do' which involves active brooding and sitting, so even then it is false. Physical imprisonment within occupation and task, including the clashing interaction with others, robs Hopkins of spiritual peace. See also 'The Woodlark' No 138 p176 for an evocation of physical freedom 'Anywhere in the sunlight'.

[313] 'a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage'.

[314] 'Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells'.

[315] 'This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age'.

[316] 'both droop deadly sometimes in their cells/Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage'.

[317] cf stanza 3 of 'The Wreck': 'I whirled out wings that spell'.

[318] See 'The Windhover' No 36 p69. See also 'I plod wondering, a-wanting' 'The Candle Indoors' No 46 p81

[319] See 'God's Grandeur' No 31 p66

[320] See 'The Caged Skylark' No 39 p70

[321] No 8 p18

[322] No 16 p26

fortiori, choice. Many of Hopkins' poems address the reality of his feeling of personal failure within his choice of vocation:

> My hopes and my unworthiness,
> At once perceived, with excess
> Of burden came and bow'd my head[323].
>
> My sap is sealed,
> My root is dry[324].
>
> I look all ways but only see
> The drear dull burthen of unending pains[325].

His challenge to his own feeling of failure echoes Isaiah's: it is faith: 'God shall strengthen all the feeble knees'[326]. This is the application of faith in the face of adversity and weakness, not only when one falls on one's knees to pray, but also when life itself makes the knees buckle. Hopkins already had, early on, a sense of his own sin and failure[327]. Compare Isaiah 49: 1-4: 'But I said, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God''. One of the most expressive poems Hopkins wrote regarding his own sense of failure is 'Justus es'[328]. This poem, Jeremiac in cast and content, relates directly to and is a translation of part of Jeremiah 12:1-5 where Jeremiah complains to God: 'You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?'. Hopkins adds: 'why must/Disappointment all I endeavour end?' and he remonstrates with his God: 'Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,/How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost/Defeat, thwart me?', echoing the second stanza of 'Carrion Comfort' where Yahweh is portrayed as a devouring lion from whom Hopkins attempts to flee. This is a portrayal of Yahweh as 'tyger', who has the power to control, command, force, Hopkins' life and feelings, but it is also a personal cry of desperation from someone waging an inner war against the 'sots and thralls of lust' which 'thrive' in spite of the speaker's efforts to combat them. Thus: 'You see me and test me – my heart is with you' (Jer 12:3) but in spite of this 'birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,/Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes'.

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[323] No 118 p162: 'But what indeed is ask'd of me?'
[324] No 127 p169: 'Trees by their yield'
[325] No 160 p203: Aeschylus: 'Prometheus Desmotes'
[326] See 'Easter Communion' No 11 p20, last line. cf Isaiah 35: 3-4: 'Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!''.
[327] See for example: 'The Alchemist in the City'; 'Myself unholy'; 'See how Spring opens' and 'My prayers must meet a brazen heaven'.
[328] No 74 p106

This is personal recognition of failure, of efforts going astray and making no difference, of time passing and the individual powerless to halt its flow, of being costive and unable to produce anything positive either written or in deed: 'a story/Of just, majestical, and giant groans'[329]. In comparison with the 'guilty' and the 'treacherous' who seem to be prolific, ('You plant them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit' yet the Lord is 'near in their mouths yet far from their hearts'[330]) Hopkins himself - whose Lord is near in his mouth as well as in his heart - plants, roots, grows, absolutely nothing and has to plead: 'O thou lord of life, send my roots rain', trusting that if only he had (and felt he had) sustenance from his God, he too could be productive, prolific, energetic in growth, act and deed. Hopkins deliberately utilises Jeremiah's complaint to overlayer his own, to provide his own words with weight and authority, and to counterpoint his personal experience with the prophet's experience. Hopkins has surely in his own life seen those who, by his criteria, are to be deprecated because successful wrongly and unfairly, for they do not deserve it. But more, it is an expression of personal agony at a life which seems dry and drought-ridden, at deeds which build nothing, do nothing, make no difference, and this plaint is prophetic in its cast, tone and sensibility.

The fragmentation of self into many voices, or differing (and warring) factions of 'self', later very much to the fore[331], are rooted in Hopkins' dialogues with his God. 'Myself unholy' is the analysis of one's own sinfulness in comparison with others. Other people are the ones who are as 'doves' to his 'rook'; they are white, peace enhancing, whilst he is black and course, peace-denying[332]. Hopkins' revelatory sight judges others as he 'looks' at their 'Eye-greeting' by which he measures their moral quality, the 'eyes' being the 'windows' of the soul. The 'sultry siege of melancholy'[333] which Hopkins perennially

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[329] No 75 p107, 'The shepherd's brow'.
[330] Jeremiah 12:2
[331] cf the Dublin sonnets: 'My own heart let me more have pity on' No 69 p102 where: 'my', 'me', 'my sad self', 'this tormented mind', 'this tormented mind', 'I', 'I', 'self', 'Jackself', 'I', 'you' – construe a multiplicity of 'selves' (voices) which speak through the speaker; a 'self' full of fragmented and vying 'selves' all fight for 'root-room' to grow and breathe. The main conceit is one of struggle and strife between conflicting and opposing parties that remains unresolved. See also No 67 p101: 'I wake and feel': 'what black hours we have spent/This night! What sights you, heart, saw; ways you went', 'With witness I speak this'; and more: 'I', 'my', 'me', 'me', 'I see', 'I am' etc. – a plurality of conflicting voices construe fragmentation and prevent resolution into one coherent whole being. See further No 64 p99 'Carrion Comfort': 'O which one? Is it each one?' – 'In me', 'I can', 'rude on me', 'my bruised bones', 'me heaped there', 'me frantic', 'my chaff', 'my grain', 'I kissed', 'my heart', 'The hero ... trod /Me? or me that fought him?'.
[332] An evocation of this is his self-appelation: 'Bran Maenefa', the rook, whereby he always sees himself as coarse and black, his voice dischordant and rough, a metaphor for his sinfulness. See No 172 p215: 'Cywydd'; also 'Maenefa' mentioned in No 137 p176: 'Moonrise'; in the 'A' manuscript of 'The Wreck' the poem is signed 'Bran Maenefa' Gardner (1967) p254; also No 147 p183: 'The Child is Father to the Man', signed 'Bran'. cf the reference to 'ravens' in No 89 p129: 'Why should their foolish bands': Death is figured as a dark-plumed bird: 'Gather the sooty plumage from Death's wings'.
[333] cf Blake: 'I begin to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men ... my stupid Melancholy' Erdman (1988) p706: letter to Cumberland July 1800; cf also Thomas: 'R S Thomas's melancholy is derived not from self-doubt and a sense of personal inadequacy but from a distaste for much in the world around him, and from a bleak recognition of how far man falls from the state of grace' Poetry Wales (Spring 1972) p103

experienced has its roots here[334] - Hopkins sees sin in others 'He has a sin of mine, he its near brother', and 'Knowing them well' can only see 'the fall' mirrored in their behaviour and choices, which leads him to a dark mood: one of frustration and resignation that the errors of the human race will never be ameliorated.

The distinction Hopkins makes between himself and others leads to biblical water metaphors. Other people are 'Fresh brooks' whilst he is by contrast 'salt .. water', bitter, undrinkable. His sight is filled with the 'fall' of self which is subsumed into the 'fall' of Adam and Eve; he sees himself as an echo of original sin, and all of his self-subjugatory acts become attempts at overturning this and reaching towards an ever-receding perfection. He perceives himself as being sinful in judging others, for only Yahweh has the power to judge hearts yet 'This fault in one I found, that in another'[335]. Hopkins feels himself a failure and unworthy because he recognises in himself the utmost sinfulness, and the only recourse he has to redemption is to look to 'no other' but Christ. Hopkins here treats Christ as a rock upon which he can lean, his faith upholds him, but the deep-rooted sense of personal failure cannot be that easily washed away – he is aware of 'the weakness of the plea/That I have taken to plead with'[336] which will always be weak in facing God.

It is clear that Hopkins found physical beauty both confusing and dangerous: 'mortal beauty – dangerous; does set danc-/ing blood ... keeps warm/Men's wits to the things that are'. He is homoerotic in describing young men[337] as 'lovely lads' who are like 'wet-fresh windfalls' and whose selves flash from their bodies and faces. But he questions himself –

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[334] Later in 1885 this 'melancholy' would become an unremitting *Weltschmerz*, where the comfort of the Paraclete is not to be had: 'Comforter, where, where is your comforting?/Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?' No 65 p100 'No worst, there is none'; 'I cast for comfort I can no more get/By groping round my comfortless' (heart, state, cell, world) - 'My own heart let me more have pity on' No 69 p102. Hopkins wrestles with and succumbs to the reeling quality of his own mind where there is no 'worst' moment than the one he *is* trapped within, his 'cries' heaving 'herds-long' and subsiding only to burgeon again: 'O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed'. Such experiences test his strength, courage, manhood and faith: 'Hold them cheap/May who ne'er hung there' with reference to Christ's hanging on the cross; as well as to Shakespeare's Henry V, Act IV, Sc III line 66: 'hold their manhoods cheap' William Shakespeare. The Complete Oxford Shakespeare. Vol I: Histories. Eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. London: Oxford University Press, 1987. p356; he 'creeps', a 'Wretch', like Blake's Nebuchadnezzar, hiding from the *Dies Irae* of his God, being made animal by powerful and ruling emotions. These are portraits of disintegration and intense spiritual desolation where Hopkins has lost all that is secure, and within a void cries before an all-powerful God whom, paradoxically, he cannot reach. There is no redemption from his situation, only sleep, and (eventually) death will provide relief and release. (cf Hopkins' own words when on the point of death: 'I am so happy')

[335] cf Matthew 7:1-5: 'For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?'.

[336] See 'Where art thou friend, whom I shall never see' No 13 p22 probably addressed to Digby Mackworth Dolben with whom for a brief time Hopkins had a very close friendship and perhaps also sexual desire. cf also No 14 p23 'The Beginning of the End': 'My love is lessened and must soon be past', 'My bankrupt heart has no more tears to spend' on 'poor love's failure' and 'hopes forgone'; also No 17 p26: 'the waste done in unreticent youth', the comment in No 18 p27: 'I reckon precedents of love,/But feel the long success of sin', and the 'dead letters sent/To dearest him that lives alas! away': No 67 p101. All connote a relationship that seems to have gone beyond friendship, even if it was not by 'deed'.

[337] Robert Martin comments: 'We know from his 1865 diaries that he was attracted to choirboys and had to reproach himself for 'Looking at a chorister at Magdalen, and evil thoughts'' Robert Bernard Martin. Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. p63

what can he do when faced with such beauty: merely meet it then leave it alone[338]. Critics are divided on the point of Hopkins' attraction to men, some declaiming their extreme distaste for the possibility of homosexual desire between Hopkins and Dolben[339], while others (particularly more recent critics) take a more balanced view[340]. Bridges' comment that 'These two sonnets must *never* be printed'[341] is revealing of some personal knowledge on his part of the real possibility of homosexual love between the two men and his horror that it might be revealed. Hopkins' own comment: 'Yet it is now too late to heal/The incapable and cumbrous shame/Which makes me when with men I deal/More powerless than the blind or lame'[342], seems to point to a paralysis he feels when surrounded by men, which paradoxically was the life he chose: 'Thirst's all-in-all, in all a world of wet'[343]. Further, Hopkins' other clues, 'Breathing bloom of a chastity in mansex fine'[344] and 'limber liquid youth, that to all I teach/Yields tender as a pushed peach'[345], lead one to suspect a homoerotic tendency even although it was never openly admitted, or indeed physically consummated[346], by Hopkins. If such things caused him to feel he had failed in life, in vocation and effort, certainly 'My prayers must meet a brazen heaven' shows failure in prayer, in being devout. His prayers are an 'empty' sowing which only bring forth a 'poor and stinting weald'. His failure is so 'harden'd', prayers fail to do away with it. Here there is no recompense, no redemption, there is merely striving and not winning, seeking and not finding, there is no access to his God. Again, he is out of tears[347]; his failure is the 'long success of sin' which he cannot seem to master. The poem is one of wrestling and struggle: 'A warfare of my lips in truth', and, like Jacob wrestling with the Angel, 'Battling with God', is now his prayer[348]. Such striving for perfection, and always failing, turns supplication to God into a war between two unequal parties which Hopkins cannot win. Failure diminishes him, while Heaven is steadfast in being 'brazen'[349] against his 'uncouth' clay, which only God can mould.

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[338] 'To what serves Mortal Beauty' No 62 p98

[339] Gardner is scrupulous in avowing that: 'there is nothing in these diaries to suggest, let alone prove, that Hopkins was *tainted* with any serious homosexual *abnormality*' [my emphasis] W H Gardner. Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition. Vol II. London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1949. p85

[340] Compare Norman White's opinion: 'Bridges' gentle, careful account [of Dolben & Hopkins] does not mention the sexual implications of the relationship, which would have been clear then as now' White (1992) p108

[341] referring to 'Where art thou friend' No 13 p22 and 'The Beginning of the End' No 14 p23, both probably connected with Digby Mackworth Dolben. Gardner notes that the manuscript sub-title to the latter was 'a neglected lover's address to his mistress', and an early draft of the sonnet contained the words: 'I am so consumèd with my shame'. See Gardner (1967) notes pp249-250

[342] No 15 p24; 'The Alchemist in the City'

[343] No 69 p102

[344] 'The Bugler's First Communion' No 48 p82

[345] cf further: 'A Voice from the World' No 81 p120, lines 48-9

[346] Passion was begun 'In the worst hour' but was not 'seconded' or continued: 'That no recorded devilish thing was done', 'The Beginning of the End' No 14 Gardner (1967) p23

[347] cf 'My bankrupt heart has no more tears to spend' No 14 p24 (iii)

[348] See later in Hopkins' life No 64 p99: 'Carrion Comfort': 'I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God'.

[349] 'Brazen': 'brazen-it-out'; brazen in the sense of Paynim, infidels, brazen also connoting the (biblical) sound of raucous trumpets.

There is a deep sense of personal unworthiness in these poems, where Hopkins is self-analytical and cannot see how he will be forgiven. He feels an absence of God, he fails to make contact, his efforts are spurned. He feels the double failure: one of deed, and one of inability to reach what he strives for. His feeling of personal unworthiness continues with 'In the Valley of the Elwy'[350] where he remembers a house where all were good to him 'God knows, deserving no such thing'. He feels undeserving of kindness and also feels at odds with nature and beauty: he is always the 'inmate' (prisoner to mortality and the flesh) who 'does not correspond'. Hopkins constantly strove to be 'The pride of faith, and home of sternest piety' but for this his life became 'An endless round of dead'ning solitude'. The only person who can redeem his failure is God, the lover of souls who 'considers' those souls[351] and judges. Only the Creator can 'complete' his creature. Hopkins sees his God as being a God of both judgement and salvation who descends with the dark, bringing the purifying *Dies Irae*, yet who is also merciful. We have come full circle to Blake's God, Yahweh, the Hebrew Bible God of both 'tyger' and 'lamb'.

In 'The Alchemist'[352] we see self-judgement by an eternal standard, a lone voice which articulates from the hub of a wheel fixed in a barren stasis while all else revolves[353]. This is an image of passivity and Hopkins seems already blighted in life, particularly within the context of the near poems. 'The Alchemist' deals with metamorphosis and exchange of place, the physical for the metaphysical, but God alone is the alchemist who can transform[354]. The speaker is at the mercy of God, but a God who is distant and unattainable and life is seen as an imprisoning thing, sin a weight bearing the individual to the ground. The poem is faithful to an idea of God, of goodness (willed action), evil (enforced stasis)[355], and judgement that leads to paralysis from which one is only freed when the physical body is left behind. The poem speaks of the cost of sin and human frailty, and of a suffering faithfulness that does not necessarily bring one closer to a hidden God.

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[350] No 34 p67

[351] 'considerate' as in he considers, 'minds' what passes; also 'considerate' as in 'caring, kind'; but 'scales' implies weighing and measuring, judging; 'considerate scales' is oxymoronic and not a comfortable image.

[352] No 15 p24

[353] 'men and masters plan and build' but 'not I build; no, but strain … and not breed one work that wakes' No 74 p107

[354] cf Jeremiah 6:27-30: 'I have made you a tester and a refiner among my people so that you may know and test their ways … they are bronze and iron, all of them act corruptly. The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed. They are called 'rejected silver' for the Lord has rejected them'.

[355] cf Blake's contraries of Urizen and Los, the former personifying a static and rational imprisonment, the latter imaginative and energetic freedom

XV

In conclusion we find Hopkins is faithful to the call to a vocation of personal privation and suffering exacted on behalf of the greater good. His moral imperative is experienced as compulsion to utter: to act creatively in expression of the reality of spirit, the active presence of God. Hopkins' testimony as witness to the world fulfils itself within didactic vision and inspired voice. Hopkins speaks from the margins with authority through a poetics of mastery and revelation. His self-abnegation of praise through sacrifice aims to make us see anew. His redemptive vision may arise out of displacement and discontinuity - the metaphysical 'wilderness' of the martyr - but Hopkins maintains an authoritative didacticism that is expressed through sustained and confident rhetorical technique. His critique of human nature and behaviour stems from his critical discrimination between 'brute' nature and a chosen moral will, his poetic of conflict comprising the distinction between interior and exterior beauty. His sacramental themes employ the Scotist idea of incarnational 'selving' elucidated through an 'insighted' analysis of intent and deed. Beings literally are by doing: 'Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: ... Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,/Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*'[356]. Hopkins' compulsion to utter, felt through the imperatives of his God and his experience of inspiration, that of being mastered by more powerful forces than himself, enacts both challenge and change - the Yahwistic 'Double-natured name'[357] personified within his poetry through a dialogue with absence and presence, darkness and light.

Hopkins' analysis of self, of direction, orientation, and choice, presents life as an endeavour of mastery and crafting, *elective* will taking precedence over *affective* will. His focus on prophetic task is always that of praise and conversion working within context – the real event of "The Wreck' (all the ruins of our wrecked past purpose), his faith, spiritual *ascesis*, efforts to reach outward towards an immanent yet receding God, contact with others, his brethren and his parishioners. The authority with which he utters stems from his experience of and belief in his own inspired 'insighted' vision. His creativity takes place within an acute awareness of the strain and tension that exists between the expression of self (his poetic persona) which elevates the self, and a religious vocation as servant of God which humbles the self[358]. The trauma and schism remain unresolved, and even

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[356] 'As kingfishers catch fire' No 57 p90

[357] See s34 of 'The Wreck'

[358] This tension is expressed through various incidents: the 'fallow' years when Hopkins refused to write, saying that it went against his vocation; also by the 'slaughter of the innocents' (see Journal entry for May 11, 1868) when he allegedly destroyed much of his *juvenilia* prior to entering the novitiate. cf his letter to Bridges: XXII Aug 7, 1868 from Oak Hill, Hampstead: 'I cannot send my Summa for it is burnt with my other verses: I saw they would interfere with my state and vocation' Abbott (1935) p24. He also continually refused Dixon, who wanted to help him get published, saying that the

provide the energy and abrasion needed to produce his poetry. Hopkins needs a theology of place, the polarities of the micro and macro, in order to locate humanity and himself in juxtaposition with God and world, and in this sense Hopkins witnesses to the personal quotidian considered *sub specie aeternitatis*. His visionary sight is revelatory of content rather than external form – he sees the life within and the beauty of its inscape - and he seeks to bridge the gap, close the energy circle, in order to link us as individuals with a wider life which we are not separate from, but an intrinsic part of. Alison Sulloway asserts that the two most divergent elements of Hopkins' character are the 'visionary prophet' whose prophecies rest upon firm dogmatic foundations, and the 'visionary aesthete' whose descriptions of God's world issue from the evidence of his own eyes[359]. His rhetorical persuasion has left us a deliberately mastered poetic which seeks not only to control the vacillating and ultimately fragile self, but also to effect change by jolting us out of jaded perception and complacent language which can only present us with a complacent world.

As a servant of God, Hopkins' vocation is martyr-like in its marginalisation, displacement and self-disciplined abnegation; he enacts the burden of wreck and wreckage whilst wrestling with his God. He considered himself a failure in his unworthiness, his sense of personal sin, and we see this considered through his dialogues, confessions and complaints before God. His faithfulness to a life in service of a higher ideal led to personal cost – the stresses and torments of self-sacrifice and self-immolation, but as an exemplar and principle: 'a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift', not selved in vain. Hopkins, in these ways, parallels the endeavours, experience, and the force-to-idealism of the Hebrew Bible prophets, whose urgent voices spoke from the edge of normal experience, yet spoke truths that went to the heart of human life. Hopkins attempted, *in extremis*, to walk in the ways of the Lord, and left behind a prophetic poetry of conflict within which we can navigate and which provides compass points[360] for our own lives.

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only place that suited his situation was to be published by the Jesuit magazine "The Month', which in the end only took 'The Eurydice'. His poetry was considered too outlandish for publication. Hopkins worried continually that his practise of poetry was sinful because it elevated the self, going against the tenets of his vocation which comprised deliberate self-abasement and humbling – poetry was a dangerous call to pride.

[359] Alison G Sulloway. Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1972. p14

[360] Hopkins comments: 'The will is surrounded by the objects of desire as the needle by the points of the compass ... it has in fact, more or less, in its affections a tendency or magnetism towards every object and the *arbitrium*, the elective will, decides which: this is the needle proper' Devlin (1959) p157

Chapter Four

R S Thomas: The Observer Through The Gap[1]

> With what sense does the parson claim the labour of the farmer?
> What are his nets & gins & traps. & how does he surround him
> With cold floods of abstraction, and with forests of solitude,
> To build him castles and high spires. where kings & priests may dwell.[2]

I

Thomas may be a 'watcher' through the gap in the hedge but he is a watcher through many gaps and over many distances, examining language as well as people, analysing the gap between ourselves and our minds and life, between our faith (or its lack) and God, between our exploration and our understanding; and in that watching he has a 'verbal hunger/for the thing in itself'[3] as he tries to elucidate our lives within the quotidian moment, 'the interval between here and now'[4], and in this relationship to time also discloses the gap between the temporal and eternal, past and present, present and future[5].

Within a wide-ranging analytical endeavour Thomas is most concerned, in a prophetic sense, with the gap between *what is* and *what should be* which comprises mankind's schism between believing and doing that separates him from both himself and God in turn increasing the gap that exists between matter and spirit. Thomas's 'watching' may then be described as 'a resolving vision'[6] which is active in its prophetic critique of choice, behaviour and willed action. His imperative, 'You must wear your eyes out,/as others their

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[1] 'And this poet finds that he, as individual and as poet, is a watcher; that he must watch, that this is the mode of his poetry and that this will not be changed' John Powell Ward. The Poetry of R S Thomas. Wales: Poetry Wales Press Ltd (Seren), 2001. p26; cf 'The Gap' from Frequencies (1978); 'The Gap' from Laboratories of the Spirit (1975); 'The Gap in the Hedge' from An Acre of Land (1952); 'The Observer' from Not That He Brought Flowers (1968) and any other refs to 'between'; quoted from R S Thomas. Collected Poems (1945-1990). London: J M Dent, 1993. pp324, 287, 29, 185 (unless otherwise listed in the primary bibliography as an individual text entry, all collections quoted are sourced from Thomas Collected Poems 1993)

[2] Blake: Visions of The Daughters of Albion Plate 5 lines 17-20 Complete Poems (1977) p202

[3] 'The Gap' from Frequencies (1978)

[4] 'Pluperfect' from Between Here and Now (1981) (hereinafter cited as Between)

[5] Thomas experiences eternity within the present: 'And, therefore repeating – every day if you like – such psalms as the 23rd or the 90th Psalm, one is allowing oneself to be stimulated or to be reached by these overtones implicit in this liturgical language. Overtones, those signals from an ever present reality. That's why I've chosen to live in the country, because not only from the auditory point of view but also from the visual point of view – one has been blessed with these sudden glimpses of eternity' 'R S Thomas – Special Issue'. Poetry Wales. Vol 7 No 4 (Spring 1972). p55; 'eternity is not something over there, not something in the future; it is close to us, it is all around us and at any given moment one can pass into it; but there is something about our mortality, the fact that we are time-bound creatures, that makes it somehow difficult if not impossible to dwell, whilst we are in the flesh, to dwell permanently in that, in what I would call the Kingdom of Heaven. But that it is close and that we get these overtones, that we get these glimpses of it, is certainly my most deeply held conviction' *ibid* p56

[6] Calvin Bedient. Eight Contemporary Poets. London: Oxford University Press, 1974. Introduction px

knees'[7] indicates that he wants us too to be watchers: of what we do and how we do it, for it is by looking and truly seeing that both understanding and change come about. In this way Thomas sees poetry as an effort to turn base metal into gold[8] and ranked with the ancient prophets' image of the refining of ore, he believes man to be purifiable, wishing us to refine our lives by active analysis and synthesis which renders life a deliberate sculpting and crafting endeavour. Shepherd concurs, believing that the pivotal concept of Thomas's poetry is the perceived gap between 'observation' and 'revelation'; unison itself rarely being Thomas's goal, he is content to point up the gaps and challenge us as readers, hearers, seers, to find resolution[9].

In order to achieve this the 'heart' is posited as the mediator which can 'close the gap' between what is seen and what is interpreted, empathy and sympathy being the appropriate tools. Thomas believes the heart helps us 'migrate' between matter and spirit[10]. Thomas's poetry as the sign on the page's space[11] is also posited as the means by which the human can search for God. The gap between God and man that God seeks to maintain and which human language seeks to bridge, represents both God's resistance to us, and our inability to fully experience his presence[12]. For Thomas every poem fills a gap in both knowledge and experience. In so doing, replacing nothing with something, it is the poem which fills the void, closes the gap between God and man, and between man and himself. The poem becomes the necessity for a need just as it fills that need – a simultaneous emptying and filling: a *kenosis* and *pleroma*[13].

Although Thomas asks himself whether he even has certainties to hand on[14], what he is sure of is that life consists of neither hurrying to reach an ever-receding future, nor hankering after some imagined past; it is rather a deliberate 'turning/aside like Moses to the miracle/of the lit bush'[15] to find a brightness that may seem transitory yet represents eternity alive before our eyes[16]. Appreciating the 'miracle of the lit bush' is comprehending the significance of the moment, the miracle of it, and the meaning of both

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[7] 'Sea-watching' from Laboratories of the Spirit (1975) (hereinafter cited as Laboratories)
[8] D Z Phillips. R S Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God: Meaning and Mediation in the Poetry of R S Thomas. Pennsylvania USA: Pickwick Publications, 1986. p169
[9] Elaine Shepherd. R S Thomas: Conceding an Absence: Images of God Explored. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996. p157
[10] 'Bird Watching' from No Truce with the Furies (1995) (hereinafter cited as No Truce)
[11] 'The Gap' in Frequencies (1978)
[12] Shepherd (1996) p105
[13] M Wynn Thomas. The Page's Drift: R S Thomas at Eighty. Bridgend, Wales: Poetry Wales Press Ltd (Seren), 1993. p104
[14] 'Sarn Rhiw' in Destinations (1985)
[15] Exodus 3: 1-5 'And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him'
[16] 'The Bright Field' in Laboratories (1975)

looking and living within that moment, for it is where the imagination is truly alive[17] and it is where we live. We may be merely organic beings of tissue and H_2O activated by 'cells firing'[18] but Thomas believes that our being and our experience of life should be much more than this. He sees us blinded by life because of the way we live and the way we see. He is concerned with mankind's *modus operandi* which he believes is a damaging thing: 'Progress/is not with the machine;/it is a turning aside,/a bending over a still pool,/where the bubbles arise/from unseen depths, as from truth/breathing, showing us by their roundness/the roundness of our world'[19]. He asks us whether we are able to see things for what they truly are when we are not properly looking. Thomas perceives matter as merely an 'invisible veil' that is all around us, yet one through which we may step to find ourselves in a state of 'innocence and delight'[20]. Thomas is assuring us that a spiritual state does indeed exist, and that it can be accessed by way of the momentary perception, if we look hard enough. This endeavour is one of reclamation and restitution, it is an attempt to reconfigure a prelapsarian vision communicated to us by way of Thomas's re-presentation of the world and of our choices, in order to undermine our perceptions of matter and self, and allow spiritual awareness to be enlivened and rejuvenated. It is the consecration of the moment to God.

II

In order to persuade us of this wide-ranging intent, Thomas takes on the mantle of prophetic critique of human society: a critical function which analyses *what is* in order that a clear perception of *what should be* can arise. Bedient asserts that almost all of his poetry is a compassionate scolding[21] and in this regard it aims to be didactic. Within Thomas's critique, we the addressees are paradigmatic of the profane gamblers at the foot of Christ's ignored cross who went on with their dicing[22], our attention held elsewhere at the expense of revelation and salvation. Thomas would be satisfied to save even one of those gamblers (one of us)[23] believing that his voice speaks on behalf of a suffering humanity before God at the same time as it castigates that humanity[24]. There is a gap then, between the 'reality' of the heartlessness of the gamblers, and the love of a God who sacrifices himself on their

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[17] 'The Bush' from Later Poems (1983)
[18] 'Seventieth Birthday' in Between (1981)
[19] 'Aside' from Mass for Hard Times (1992) (hereinafter cited as Mass)
[20] 'Wrong?' from No Truce (1995)
[21] Bedient (1974) p55
[22] 'Suddenly' from Laboratories (1975)
[23] 'He atones not ...' from Counterpoint (1990)
[24] "The challenges laid down by R S Thomas are impossible to ignore. Ultimately concerned with language, they yet address the quality of the lives we seek to live ... In the empire of mammon, he evokes values' Poetry Wales 'Special Issue – R S Thomas at 80' (July 1993) Vol 29 No 1 p14; cf also the comment re his prophetic persona: 'His habitual poetic persona, angry, denigrating, violent, chillingly candid' (*ibid* p22); 'In taking on the role of a prophet in the Old Testament mode he has become a thorn in our collective flesh' (*ibid* p50)

behalf, and what we live is 'the gap between/word and deed we try/narrowing with an idea'[25]. This gap is not unassailable however, for 'the abyss/is nothing because it is nothing/but an idea'[26]. We can cross it, close it, by way of ideas and ideals and Thomas holds these out to us. All we have to do is willingly turn aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush[27] – a potential epiphany or theophany within the mundane moment when we can find ourselves on holy ground. This miracle can happen within any quotidian: the mundane life of ordinary people, of ourselves[28].

Thomas's critique of such 'mundane' life is represented by the portrait of the composite individual 'Iago Prytherch'[29] pursued over many poems and presented as just an 'ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills'[30]. He is conceived as a paradigmatic human who is also 'the acknowledged centre of much of Thomas's self'[31]. Thomas seeks to use him, and the hill farmers, to change our attitudes *from* a position of critical repugnance, repulsion, and repudiation (which is his own), *to* one of sympathy and acceptance (which is what he himself strives for)[32]. This is Thomas's verse-pilgrimage[33], his tongue 'clambering/up their one story'[34] where he watches them, and judges them as our representative, from the edge of their fields and lives describing them as 'far out from the shore' of their hedges, 'marooned there' on their bare islands as he stares from the main road[35]. In so doing Thomas acknowledges his awareness of 'the strange calling' he follows that keeps him there as watcher, carrying out a prophetic critique of society.

Thomas's initial descriptions of Prytherch are condemnatory: he is seen as stupid with a half-witted grin and there is something frightening in the vacancy of his mind[36]. Prytherch also has (in Thomas's eyes) disgusting habits and lacks manners: he is spattered with

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[25] 'Agnus Dei' from Mass (1992)
[26] 'Question' from Mass (1992)
[27] As Thomas says: 'The message only reaches the person who stops and pays attention' R S Thomas. Autobiographies. Tr. Jason Walford Davies. London: J M Dent, 1997. p54 (hereinafter cited as Auto)
[28] This parallels Blake's idea within 'Auguries of Innocence' that in every grain of sand you can see a world, or in every wild flower you can see heaven - one only has to be willing to look; the kind of epiphany Thomas describes also links with Blake's testimony of seeing, suddenly, angels in a tree on Peckham Rye: affirming the possibility of apprehending the fantastic and otherworldly within the realm of matter
[29] 'He called his first character, the farmer he had seen docking swedes, Iago Prydderch, spelling it Prytherch so that his English readers would pronounce it correctly' Auto (1997) p54
[30] 'A Peasant' in The Stones of the Field (1946) (hereinafter cited as Stones)
[31] A E Dyson. Yeats, Eliot and R S Thomas: Riding the Echo. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981. p290
[32] 'The tension had existed when he was in Manafon, the contrast between the beauty of nature and the squalor of man. But there were excuses. The work on the land was so hard that there was no way or time to refine the mind. R.S. showed this in his poetry in order to make his readers conscious of the difference between their comfortable lives and the labour and sweat of the farmers' Auto (1997) p108
[33] Phillips (1986) p37
[34] 'He portrayed the life of the small farmer as an act of protest against the ignorance and apathy of the rich and the well-off. But through those poems there ran a religious vein that became more visible during his last years. After all, there is nothing more important than the relationship between man and God. Nor anything more difficult than establishing that relationship' Auto (1997) p104; cf 'West Coast' in Welsh Airs (1987)
[35] 'The Figure' from The Bread of Truth (1963) (hereinafter cited as Bread)
[36] 'A Peasant' from Stones (1946)

spittle, leans to gob in the fire, and his clothes stink, 'sour with years of sweat/And animal contact'[37]. Prytherch is 'savage' rather than refined[38] and the poet as he wades closer to find the dark wrack of the man's thoughts lifting and falling round a thick skull[39] shows himself to be in the process of trying to understand unfamiliar and unknown habits from which he recoils because they shock him. Dyson asks though, who is shocked, who is frightened? Is it the 'cultured' man looking on and judging Iago, or perhaps rather judging himself and his own reactions?[40]. The answer, incorporating Thomas as representative 'cultured' person and Iago as representative of the uncouth and animalistic, would appear to be 'yes', but Thomas is also judgemental of his own attitudes, and this journey through self-awareness[41] is the *locus* of a paradigmatic redemptive and ameliorative process.

Thomas articulates his awareness of 'difference' in these poems, providing us with a critique of what separates and divides, yet he is also being self aware, self-critical: 'It were as well to bring the tup to the wild mare,/Or put the heron and the hen to couple,/As mate a stranger from the fat plain/With that gaunt wilderness'[42]. We, the onlookers, are representative of 'the fat,/Monoglot stranger'[43] who looks but does not see, the word 'they'[44] indicating a 'them' and 'us' attitude which enhances alienation. As ever with Thomas, it is 'the cold bar/Of reason'[45] that is the block to understanding; he encourages empathy, sympathy, things of the heart not the head, to help us reach a conception of parity and common humanity that lies beneath surface difference.

Prytherch is also given a viewpoint on this minister's presence in his life, and is aware of 'difference' there too: the minister's thoughts flow too swiftly for him, upsetting his equilibrium, his sense of peace and belonging in the place where he is, until he suddenly feels 'the cold/Winds of the world blowing'. What the minister opens up to him can never be shut again, and he finds his world has been unpleasantly invaded: 'The patched gate/You left open will never be shut again'[46]. Yet he too asks forgiveness for his judgements: thus both Prytherch and the minister reach the point of penitence and

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[37] 'A Peasant' from Stones (1946)
[38] See the comparison of the 'savage skulls' of the hill farmers in 'A Priest to His People' with the 'ivory skull' (denoting preciousness and rarity) of Yeats in 'Memories of Yeats', both from Stones (1946)
[39] 'The Figure' from Bread (1963)
[40] Dyson (1981) p290
[41] 'The poet's relentless self-scrutiny, as a poet, as a Welshman, as a priest and as a human being, is one of the conditions of his poetry' Justin Wintle. Furious Interiors: Wales, R S Thomas and God. London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1996. Preface pxvii
[42] 'The Airy Tomb' from Stones (1946)
[43] 'Traeth Maelgwn' in Not That He Brought Flowers (1968) (hereinafter cited as Flowers)
[44] See for example, the usage of 'They' in 'The Dark Well' from Tares (1961) which Dyson feels 'surely includes city dwellers passing in cars, careless observers, the contented citizens of 'modernity' - all those who attract the poet's contempt, whenever they appear in his work' Dyson (1981) p292
[45] 'The Figure' from Bread (1963)
[46] 'Invasion on the Farm' in Song at the Year's Turning (1955) (hereinafter cited as Song)

confession, as each asks the other for forgiveness, wanting absolution for the awareness of dissonance between them, division erected by their respective *a priori* 'values' which they both recognise and strive to overturn.

These examples attempt to portray the reality of how human beings view and judge one another, and in this sense, Thomas is providing a critique of social division that comprises prevailing attitudes and values, and through this critique he aims to be didactic. He shows us our reality, and then turns us towards what he believes should be. Following a portrayal of schism and alienation, Thomas tries to focus on what unites and unifies, striving for the recognition of an underlying sameness that incorporates an holistic view of humanity and closes the gaps between us, trying to overturn ideas of difference and separation: he asks whether from the standpoint of education or caste or creed there is anything to show that another's essential need is any different to his own[47], and he lets the hill farmer speak for himself, pleading for us to 'Listen, listen, I am a man like you'[48]. The poet asks whether the labourer is a 'wild tree' with a 'slow heart beating to the hidden pulse/Of the strong sap?', alien, other, and the answer comes: no, no, he is a man like you, only blind with tears of sweat due to hard work, hard life[49]. Thomas distances himself from our deprecatory eyes as he now validates what he previously condemned, and in turn condemns us – we may see a poor farmer with no name (no house, no wealth, no status) but he sees 'Prytherch, the man'[50]. Thomas now regards the hill people with compassion, saying that he was not born to question them, only to see what they (and we) really are – human beings living on the golden landscape of nature, twisted by life and each bearing his load[51].

This movement from outright denunciation through to sympathy, acceptance, even admiration, is a spiritual process of self-critical analysis comprising penitence, confession and absolution[52]. The condemnation that produces 'the terrible poetry of his kind'[53] moves towards awareness of the hill farmers' speech as the 'source of all poetry, clear as a rill' and

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[47] 'Affinity' from Stones (1946)
[48] 'The Hill Farmer Speaks' in An Acre of Land (1952) (hereinafter cited as Land)
[49] 'The Labourer' from Land (1952)
[50] 'The Dark Well' in Poetry for Supper (1958) (hereinafter cited as Poetry)
[51] 'The Observer' from Flowers (1968)
[52] Thomas himself confesses his change in attitude from condemnation to admiration: 'Well, I came out of a kind of bourgeois environment which, especially in modern times, is protected; it's cushioned from some of the harsher realities; and this muck and blood and hardness, the rain and the spittle and the phlegm of farm life was, of course, a shock to begin with and one felt that this was something not quite part of the order of things. But, as one experienced it and saw how definitely part of their lives this was, sympathy grew in oneself and compassion and admiration; and since you've got in these communities people who've probably been like this over the centuries, the very fact that they endure at all – that they make a go of it at all – suggests that they have got some hard core within them' Poetry Wales (Spring1972) p50
[53] 'The Dark Well' from Tares (1961)

renders their dwelling on the bare hill an 'artistry'[54]. His revised stance has had to move through penitential territory which included the gain of self-knowledge of his own invective[55]. Two 'unlike' people have become 'like', community and co-operation are possible, and this parabolic journey towards the 'closing of the gap' is a prophetic attempt to portray the possibility of universal brotherhood despite cultural and social dissonance. We should all be engaged in the task of consciousness-raising in order to 'learn to confront/the intellect with its issue'[56] – the issue of ourselves and the choices we make, the way we deal with the world, how and what we see. Such self-evaluation is about searching for the door to oneself in dumbness and blindness[57], knowing that we do not have the answers but we must ask the questions. This should be an open and willing endeavour without preconceptions. Thomas asks forgiveness of the hill people for his initial hatred, his intolerance[58], and he asks the same of Prytherch, that he forgives his 'naming' or classifying him[59]. Thomas comes to realise, in his parabolic journey from condemnation to admiration, that is was Prytherch who was 'right the whole time'[60].

In order to highlight his prophetic concern for critiquing human society, for providing us with a critical analysis of ourselves that is didactic at its heart, in order to save even one of the gamblers at the foot of the cross, and enable us to cross our human 'abyss' by way of an idea, Thomas consistently uses the *leitmotiv* of the mirror as mode of self-analysis, for "There are questions we are the solution/to'[61] even although 'the mirror is self-knowledge which is painful'[62]. He declares that even although the furies are at home in the mirror, it is their residence and there the struggle takes place[63]; he believes there should be no truce with them, implying that there should be no truce with the self. We all have inside of us primitive, avenging spirits who arise in order to wreak havoc and vengeance in response to 'crimes' we feel have been committed against the self or those to whom we are close. The vengeance of our personal injured furies rests upon the assumption that crime against kin is also a crime against God[64], the furies' vengeance becoming the retribution of God to be visited on betrayal of kinship[65], but Thomas counters this presumption by stating that the answer is at the back of the mirror where truth lies[66], for truth ultimately lies within

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[54] 'A Priest to His People' from Stones (1946)
[55] 'A Priest to His People' in Stones (1946)
[56] 'Other incarnations ...' from 'Incarnation' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[57] 'This To Do' from Pietà (1966)
[58] 'A Priest to His People' from Stones (1946)
[59] 'Iago Prytherch' from Poetry (1958)
[60] 'Absolution' *ibid*
[61] 'Emerging' from Laboratories (1975)
[62] Ward (2001) p55
[63] 'Reflections' from No Truce (1995)
[64] for 'walking with God' *is* being kind to kin and others, is faith in action
[65] of the paradigm of Cain and Abel
[66] 'Contradictions' in Residues (2002)

ourselves and it is something we have to find, and want to find. We cannot escape the looking glass[67] - there is no point in asking 'let me go ... To find mirrors that do not reproach/My smooth face'[68] because all mirrors undoubtedly will: 'Look over the edge/of the universe and you see/your own face staring/at you back, as it does/in a pool'[69]. There is no escaping the self.

Act is also direction, for the things by which we orientate ourselves, and through the directions in which we travel, based on the destinations we wish to obtain, is living comprised – we must wander the dark in order to gain the light[70]. In this regard, Thomas uses other *leitmotivs*, that of Adam and Eve and the Fall, to explore the ongoing state of mankind. Thomas perceives mankind's explorations and directions as being a move outward from Eden, from the beginning where he was expelled, into an unknown world which man, like a child, must learn to navigate: we hold our way towards the light, inspecting our shadows[71]. As Adam and Eve we are confederates together, navigating the natural day and stepping towards the future and the machine[72].

Within this pilgrimage, Thomas's critique articulates several things: that the destination is the self[73], that we arrive back at the place we set out from[74], but arrive changed[75], that the journey is a circular one[76]; beneath this concept lying Eliot's view that

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[77]

Eliot is the forerunner of Thomas in perceiving that our explorations will always be explorations of what we are, what we've been, and what we should be, and we only ever come back to 'face' ourselves. Thomas is anxious that within this circularity of learning, it is above all science, technology, progress we must question[78], with all that these entail[79].

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[67] 'Looking Glass' from Experimenting with an Amen (1986) (hereinafter cited as Experimenting)
[68] 'Mother and Son' from Tares (1961)
[69] 'The Game' from Frequencies (1978)
[70] 'Finality' in Residues (2002)
[71] 'Once' from H'm (1972)
[72] 'Life is a pilgrimage' Auto (1997) p106
[73] 'Moving away is only to the boundaries/of the self'; 'The best journey to make/is inward. It is the interior/that calls' – 'Groping' from Frequencies (1978)
[74] 'destinations are the familiarities/from which the traveller must set out' in 'Journeys' from Mass (1992)
[75] 'our journeys/through time we come round not/to the same place, but recognise it/from a distance. It is the dream/we remember, that makes us say:/'We have been here before'' from 'Cones' in Experimenting (1986)
[76] 'Where to turn/when there are no corners? In curved/space I kept on arriving/at my departures' from 'Pluperfect' in Between (1981)
[77] 'Little Gidding' V 239-242 from T S Eliot Four Quartets. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1944. p48
[78] 'The Hearth' in H'm (1972) posits two humans in love (heart) who could birth a child of their love versus the 'statesmen/And scientists' who, in a parody of the three kings, bear gifts, but only 'with their hands full/Of the gifts that

These, within his poetics, are posited as polar 'opposites' of the heart and the heart's meaning and are perceived to be both damaging and dangerous: science and technology are the darknesses which waylay us in our journey towards the light[80]. Thomas conceives of the future as being the place we set out; our direction may be ever towards the light, but the brightness is always within, at the interior horizon, where 'science' confronts 'love' and is transfigured[81]. Rationality is therefore kept at bay and in place by the heart's power, the former a danger to humanity because of its potential for coldness, clinicality and harm, the latter being the true way of redemption, kinship and the humanitarian ideal. Thomas's attack on 'science' is outspoken and unremitting: 'What has physics to do/with the heart's need?'[82] – the 'new explorers' don't go anywhere and what they discover we can't see, but they change our lives[83]. Thomas perceives that the territory of exploration itself has changed –he conceives of the 'old' explorers, exploring the geography and topography of the planet, the 'outward-sighted' journey that was towards the stars. The 'new' explorers by contrast, go inwards towards smaller and smaller components of life, seeking parting and dissection, as if in the infinite halving of things we could discover the secret of life and the *locus* of God: 'deep down is as distant/as far out, but is arrived at/in no time', and language accompanies this progress: 'These are the new/linguists'. It is language that must toil behind those that pave the way, the new vocabulary of life toiling[84] 'behind science, behind music,/the brush'[85]. As it toils to keep up with 'progress' it leaves much behind and begins to lose sight of God[86] until the water of life is sucked-out of our words and we find ourselves in a desert of language with the old signpost that had the word 'God' on it, worn away[87].

Continuing his critical function, Thomas opines that the human mind and emotions, often in conflict, are crucial components of our empirical apparatus that attempts to make sense of life; however, 'it is/man's mind is to blame,/spinning questions out of itself/in the infinite regress?'[88]. Thomas realises he is engaged in an 'agon' and at the very beginning of this

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destroy' – the gifts they bring to the couple's potential Christ-child are gifts of destruction, the 'rough beast' that slouches towards Bethlehem to be born, signifier of chaos as against Christ's personification of unity and harmony.

[79] 'the scientists attempted/to turn the heart's darkness into intellectual day' from 'History' in Experimenting (1986)

[80] 'Destinations' from Destinations (1985)

[81] According to Bedient (1974): 'Thomas never really challenges the mind. His appeal is all to feeling - to compassion, indignation, awe, the love of beauty' p52

[82] 'Credo' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' in Mass (1992)

[83] 'They' from The Way of It (1977)

[84] 'The further [water] spreads over the face of the earth, the shallower it becomes. So too with a world language. There is a possibility that it might lose contact with its roots and as a consequence be unable to express the depths of man's soul' Auto (1997) p164

[85] 'The Refusal' in Mass (1992)

[86] 'Tricyano-aminopropene -/it is our new form/of prayer' from Counterpoint (1990)

[87] 'Directions' from Between (1981)

[88] 'Silent, Lord ...' from 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990)

struggle resides the word[89]. The struggle is also with language, then, for it is by language that we create, name, and understand by naming. We have no choice but to language our experience: behind the word is the name and all our sentences are like footprints, arrested indefinitely on its threshold. The 'agon' is learning we are here, is exploring the words that denote our presence, fingering and feeling through the coldness of our environments until our learned perceptions change these media to the softness of feathers and a warm heart beating[90]. Beneath the weight of language that is the distillation of man's 'progress' in time, exists God's live, activating presence waiting to be found. In direct opposition to this, the scientists merely teach us the possibility of thinking without words[91]; language has been infiltrated by daub and symbol[92], invaded by meaninglessness which contributes to the death of God. Our obsession with language probably means that we are already too late to save it. The only way to encompass both science and God within life's circle is to embrace both, to perceive life as the laboratory of the spirit[93]. Our circular pilgrimage[94] contains within it the potentiality for finding God and we need not return to our lost Eden[95], the 'snake-haunted garden' from which we were ejected, we can find Eden anew within our lives and progress now, here, within our tall cities of glass that are the spirit's laboratory, worked on by an alchemical God who distils[96].

This is why Thomas can say that the 'brute ugliness' of matter does not go unchallenged - even although the spirit is 'enchained' within 'the gross flesh'[97] it is spirit which challenges ugliness and pain, which can raise itself above the mire and blood of our mortal realm and sing out its own wild note of praise like a bird on the wing[98]. Thomas affirms that spirit within *is* the presence of God and that we are looking in the wrong places if we wish to find him: 'Deus absconditus!/We ransack the heavens,/the distance between/stars; the last place we look/is in prison, his hideout/in flesh and bone'.

In the poem 'Circles' from Mass for Hard Times, there is a round world which is dissected by a horizontal horizon line where love and truth reside, ever-receding from us, and

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[89] 'The Reason' in Mass (1992)
[90] 'The Reason' in Mass (1992)
[91] 'Preference' *ibid*
[92] 'RIP' *ibid*
[93] 'What are our lives but harbours/we are continually setting out/from, airports at which we touch/down and remain in too briefly/to recognise', for 'the point of travelling is not/to arrive, but to return home/laden with pollen you shall work up/into the honey the mind feeds on' 'Somewhere' in Laboratories (1975)
[94] Thomas's own personal pilgrimage completed a geographic 'oval' from childhood to retirement - an 'outward Anglican career' curving to follow 'an inward Welsh return-journey' Auto (1997) Introduction pxix
[95] Change and progress comprise an inevitable belief in our 'ability to travel/onward for ever', but after all our outward travel we will only find that 'gravity/began drawing them down to where/they had set forth ... the knowledge broke/on them that infinity also/was round' 'Circles' in No Truce (1995) and when we return Thomas believes we will find that nothing has changed; the status quo is assured.
[96] 'Emerging' from Laboratories (1975)
[97] This idea of the body imprisoning the spirit is found in both Hopkins and Blake.
[98] 'The Cry' in Poetry (1958)

crossing this horizontal is the vertical 'rope-trick' of language. Here, as elsewhere, Thomas gives us axis, horizon, circle and cross – visual metaphors for the earth and the planetary bodies, and also for our relationship with the Divine through Christ. The evocation of Deity is located in the image of the cross as the terrestrial place where divine and human meet, the visible *locus* of God in our world. The one enduring image of humanity striving towards God is the climbing of a mountain, which we need the oxygen of the spirit to achieve[99]. We are always, however, only half-way up[100], and God eludes us like insubstantial mist[101]. Our climb involves language to express the climb itself, the absence of God, and the failure of man, language itself as a ladder the poet throws down to us[102]. We are like Jacob[103], wrestling at the bottom[104] of the ladder to no end because we merely wrestle with the withholding of a name, which, without a name remains unidentifiable[105].

In his aim to be didactic, characteristic of prophecy, Thomas asserts in 'The Journey'[106] that wherever we go we will meet those who tell us there is no God, there will always be other roads and other men with the same creed and he issues us with the imperative to 'take no notice' and take our own road, assert our own beliefs upon our lives and live them for ourselves. Our journey is a spiritual one, and it will not be without struggle, and it may lead to our own version of the Cross. The journey too, as an end in itself, never ends for it is the diachronic continuity, the ongoing struggle of mankind, that lies beneath synchronic individual experience. There is no need to ask in which period did we get lost[107], for we are always lost, and the sacred places always exist for us to seek them out: 'How close/need a shrine be to be too far/for the traveller of today who is in/a hurry?'[108]. Out of the many roads we travel we always have choices, and Thomas provides us with an invitation of voices, tempting us. We can either come back to the rain, the small talk of the wind, the chapel's temptation, or we can choose the streets of the cities where the pound beckons[109]. Thomas asks us to make choices using the apparatus we have: heart, emotion, rationality, intellect, faith, for each will take us different roads by way of different knowledge. He pleads for the 'affective contexts' within which the need for God is located[110] and tells us

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[99] 'Relay' in Laboratories (1975)
[100] 'Kyrie' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)
[101] 'I know him ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[102] 'Circles' from Mass (1992)
[103] 'Jacob's/ladder: the Indian/rope trick of the soul', 'Codex' 'R S Thomas Later Poetry – Special Feature'. Poetry Wales. (Spring 1979) p5
[104] 'This at the bottom ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[105] 'The Waiting' from No Truce (1995)
[106] Poetry (1958)
[107] 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths' in Welsh Airs (1987)
[108] 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths' *ibid*
[109] 'Invitation' from H'm (1972)
[110] Phillips (1986) p123

we must learn to distrust the distrust of feeling, that this should be our next step[111]. This imperative runs contrary to Hopkins' stance which favours the 'elective' will over the 'affective' will – that we must be directed by rational and willed intention and not waylaid by our natural instincts, bodily needs, or our irrational (and therefore dangerous) heart. Thomas wants us to respond to our emotions, Hopkins wants us to control them. They posit polar opposite 'routes' to God. Phillips argues that 'Faced with sufferings, questions, alternatives, vulgarities, the poet is forced back onto primitive religious reactions where, minimally, he reaches out for something, being unable to develop the gesture into a more satisfactory unity'[112], but what Phillips misses is that primitive religious reactions *are* the heart's response to life, and the poet's response to life, and are more than a 'gesture'; the reaction is itself an act, a positive doing that exhibits both oneself and one's values. Even the poem which Phillips cites in his defence of this position should be interpreted as more than mere 'reaction': it is, rather, positive expression of 'doing' (one might even say 'selving): 'I emerge'; 'I have heard'; 'I have lingered'; 'I was leading upward'; 'I am alone'; '[I] put my hand out'[113]. Thomas's poems are attempts at modifying deed, inculcating heart, leading us the reader/hearer/seer *towards* life with all its contradictions and conflicting values, and that makes of his poetics a positive prophetic force for change.

It also makes of his poetics a prophetic debate about *value* and society's judgement of value: wherein does worth reside and what are our markers of this?[114]. He uses Prytherch again: 'You never heard of Kant, did you, Prytherch?'[115] raising the matter of intellectual disparity between the uncouth Iago and the refined and intellectual Kant, with its sublimated assumption that we would, by way of an 'education' and 'literary' marker, as well as an implied 'class' marker, approve of Kant and disapprove of Iago. The two exemplars are counterpoints on a scale of values: they are posited as being unlike one another and had they met, Kant's logic would have failed, and Iago's mind, exposed to the 'cold wind of genius' would have faltered[116]. Thomas expresses the belief that here is no meeting point, no common ground between such disparate people and minds, and he extrapolates to incorporate the gap between the workings of the intellect (rationality) and the workings of the heart (feeling) saying to Prytherch that he is not interested in space and time, or the mathematical descriptions of reality; he merely has a green calendar which his

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[111] For we are in a relationship with God: 'I feel sometimes/we are his penance/for having made us. He/suffers in us and we partake/of his suffering' – this is the 'covenant' we have with God: 'Covenant' in Between (1981).
[112] Phillips (1986) p151-2
[113] 'Threshold', the last poem in Between (1981)
[114] 'He asked himself about the condition and function of the smallholder in his fields. What was he thinking about, if about anything? Was he of equal value to the important, learned people of the world?' Auto (1997) p59
[115] 'Green Categories' from Poetry (1958)
[116] 'Green Categories' *ibid*

heart observes[117]. The *modus operandi* of each approach is imposed by the 'controller' each uses, the 'coldness' of cerebral mathematics versus the 'warmth' of human feeling with the concomitant implication that one is in kinship with and responds to the seasonal cycles while the other cannot. Yet, in order to reach some kind of synthesis, some 'bridge' to cross the gulf between them, Thomas believes they could have met, sharing their faith 'over a star's blue fire', as if the remote and unintelligible object, and their human responses to it, given the chance, might have been one and the same, for Iago is 'intellectual' in his own realm, a scholar of the fields' pages[118] whose attributes and capabilities ought to be judged by different criteria to the ones we habitually use.

Thomas's critique of human society, in tandem with his irascible scolding, continues to posit original sin as the endemic force which must be fought: 'This canker was in the bone/Before man bent to his image/In the pool's glass'[119]. He believes it must go on being fought because Eden and our expulsion from it are forever being played out: 'This is Eden/over again. The child/holds out both his hands/for the breast's apple. The snake is asleep'[120]. The Madonna and Christ-child represent all mothers and children where innocence is re-born into the world in order to redeem it, to overturn Adam's failure and make all things new; the Pietà[121] is the representative objective correlative for the death of a son who is innocent of the world's net[122], but whose death merely heralds his rebirth, and the cycle beginning again. Ideas of birth, fall, redemption, death, resurrection – eternally archetypal and representative of man's (Adam's) and God's (Christ's) life cycles, are made earthly and mortal by Thomas as he links the soil of Wales with Eden and the reality of man's struggle to survive with Adam's curse: 'I am the farmer, stripped of love/And thought and grace by the land's hardness'[123]. The day dawns fiercely on a parched land, on fields to the east of the city, bitter with sage and thistles[124]. The priests are sad as they finger their beads and pray for the lost people of the soil. Thomas's vision is biblical: a landscape of pain, a savage agriculture being practised, villagers waiting for the next one to die[125]. The legacy of original sin passed on through the generations in this context is represented by the passing-on of wealth (mammon) by way of the chequebook from grandparents to the grandchildren through their children, who in turn will watch

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[117] 'Green Categories' *ibid*
[118] 'Which' from Tares (1961)
[119] 'Aside' from Pietà (1966)
[120] 'Mother and Child' in Destinations (1985)
[121] 'Pietà' from Pietà (1966)
[122] 'Ap Huw's Testament' from Poetry (1958)
[123] 'The Hill Farmer Speaks' from Land (1952)
[124] 'Burgos' in Flowers (1968)
[125] 'Tenancies' *ibid*

themselves grow old without love which is promised but does not materialise. The curse on Adam is enacted by the rural Welsh before his very eyes[126].

Thomas's critical function, his critique of humanity and society, shows us that the current faces of 'Adam' are the old faces[127] forever existing in relationship with the earth[128]. He superimposes synchronic faces[129] upon a diachronic timeframe[130], providing a relationship with the past[131] that endows our lives with both cycle and change which comprise the continuity of race and its emphemerality. Our world is the same world before wars were contested[132] and the farmer in his acres lives on the old side of life, quietly repairing history's tears with his hands. Thomas articulates his point of view that beyond war and current events that comprise synchronic immediacy and the quotidian, man farms the land like he has always done, providing underlying continuity and diachronic stability that is both in touch with the past and ensures that the past's lineage lives on. The great problems remain unsolved and man can only leave his footprints momentarily on a vast shore[133] but this does not mean that we are powerless to effect change – it is through perception, way of looking, choice of deed, and underlying ethical ethos upholding the act of the hands, that life and progress are effected.

One of the most enduring images within Thomas's poetry and which he uses to critique our so-called 'progress' negatively, is that of the machine. The life of the machine, representative of our 'aftershock' present, the reality of a post industrial-revolution age, is posited as a symbol of technological advancement at the expense of poetry, art and spirit[134]. Thomas writes within the 'aftershock' of the industrial revolution and a 20th century hostility to technocratic science. Hopkins wrote from within the burgeoning actuality of the industrial revolution, horror-struck by its pollution and the reality of its human exploitation. Blake was prophetic of the industrial revolution, seeing its incipient seeds in the workhouses of the poor and viewing the satanic mills of Newton's mind as

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[126] 'What upsets the Edenic applecart, is not the serpent, but Thomas himself, seeking knowledge, leading his parents to the forbidden fruit' Wintle (1996) p97

[127] 'He has been here since life began' 'The Labourer' from Land (1952); 'tacking against the fields'/Uneasy tides. What have the centuries done/To change him?' *ibid*; cf also 'Power' in Poetry (1958)

[128] 'He was in the fields, when I set out./He was in the fields, when I came back./In between ... What centuries might have elapsed' 'Truth' in Bread (1963)

[129] 'The face of the farmer 'will go on; that much is certain ... tenancies of the fields/Will change; machinery turn/All to noise. But on the walls/Of the mind's gallery that face ... will hang/Unglorified, but stern like the soil' 'The Face' in Pietà (1966)

[130] 'Gazing on the pre-Cambrian rocks in Braich y Pwll, R.S. realised that he was in contact with something that had been there for a thousand million years. His head would spin. A timescale such as this raised all kinds of questions and problems' Auto (1997) p78

[131] '... there were people here/Before these and they were no better./And there'll be people after may be, and they'll be/No better; it is the old earth's way/Of dealing with time's attrition' The Minister (1953)

[132] 'For the Record' from Pietà (1966)

[133] 'Young and Old' from Young and Old (1972)

[134] 'He could not continue to talk of the world of nature all the time, but had to try to face some of the problems of the day, and of the mind of man' Auto (1997) p65

being paradigmatic of humanity's obsession with itself. Thomas followed Coleridge's line of thought, believing that the true antithesis of poetry is not prose but 'science'[135], and he viewed the industrial revolution in Wales and the wider world as a disaster[136].

Thomas explains: 'I took the machine as a symbol of all sorts of technology and scientific curiosity ... it's the over-use of technology in service of the libido, this unquenchable desire for more and more material goods and material pleasures and so on. That is the enemy, and it's that that I see the machine as being the provider of, and in the process, of course, enslaving man. In the process of giving man these things the price it asks is enslavement. The great saying of Christianity about God is that his service is perfect freedom, whereas to me the service of the machine is perfect enslavement'[137]. Thus we have a panoply of impressions, fears, testimonies, exhortations, and warnings throughout Thomas's *corpus* with respect to the 'machine' and all that this image entails: 'the machine becomes the cross on which men suffer to no end'[138] – we crucify ourselves with it. Thomas consistently views the machine as a dark source of power where good cannot be distinguished from evil[139]. He views the machine in moral terms because good and evil are what we do, and the machine 'goes itself', 'myself' it speaks and spells, it is how we use it that matters[140]. Thomas views it as having a cold brain that will destroy[141], because our cold brain has created it, and because its fuel is in reality the fuel of human souls[142]. The machine represents our winter, matter elevated at the expense of spirit[143]. The 'meeting' of man and machine[144] is envisaged by Thomas as a kind of absorption, saying of Cynddylan (who enacts a fall from grace), 'He's a new man now, part of the machine,/His nerves of metal and his blood oil'[145] – intimating we are all new beings, part of the machine as

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[135] Wintle (1996) p306; cf Coleridge: 'Coleridge begged first to be permitted to say that in his view poetry was no proper antithesis to prose. In truth, *the correct opposite of poetry was science*, and the correct antithesis of prose was metre' 'The Third Lecture' from 'Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton' Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Shakespearean Criticism Vol 2. Ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor. London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1960. pp48-49; Shelley too is critical of man's cultivation of 'science', believing that this 'external' expansion only leads to 'internal' retraction, that of slavery and imprisonment, the material 'single' vision of Newton: 'We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave' Shelley 'A Defence of Poetry' Norton Anthology II (1993) p761

[136] Auto (1997) p98

[137] An extract of an interview that Thomas gave, see Shepherd (1996) p116-7

[138] See Shepherd (1996) p167

[139] 'The body is mine ...' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)

[140] Yet, paradoxically: 'R. S. would give thanks that the machine had arrived, to save ships from being at the mercy of such seas' Auto (1997) p91

[141] 'Too Late' in Tares (1961)

[142] 'Lore' *ibid*

[143] 'The Seasons' in Mass (1992); 'Many former worshippers have lost their faith because of the popular but over-simple presentation of science and technology. R.S. would attack these dogmas quite consistently, seeking to counteract their injurious influence on the majority of people' Auto (1997) p85

[144] 'Once' from H'm (1972)

[145] 'Cynddylan on a Tractor' from Land (1952); the use of the name 'Cynddylan' is significant in that he was a real person, Prince of Powys, who is memorialised in the cycle of 'Saga englynion' of the 10th century, and its use signifies

progress envelops us, becoming the machine (and becoming as cold and clinical and mechanical as the machine, leaving our humanity behind us). Cynddylan becomes paradigmatic, enacting as sign our absorption into the onward momentum of technology which, Thomas believes, will ultimately destroy us.

It is through our dance of death with the machine that we lose our true heart, are decentered and off-balance. By contrast, Thomas perceives the centre to be the empty, silent desert with its one blossoming flower, where the true dance, the spiritual dance, takes place[146]. However, we choose to turn on a different 'gyre', 'circling on a wind/that was once wild and now drags/itself round and round laden/with satellites'. Our lives circle around the cold, dreary, material hub of our society far away from nature and wide spaces of silence and wind. Science and industry are the 'baubles' which money can buy, but are pyrites only and do not feed the spirit. As life puts on speed[147], we are consumers of it at vast cost[148] and Thomas feels we are travelling but going nowhere; we only keep moving to bring our arrival nearer to our departure[149]. We have been given the legacy of instant gratification, an instant existence[150] and we endanger ourselves by our directionless accelerations[151]. Thomas gives us prophetic warning that we are dangerously out of kilter: 'For millions of years, despite the killing and the devouring, the earth has kept the balance, and it is only in our period of history, and specifically towards the close of the present century, that we have started to see how man in his blindness and greed is endangering the earth's future'[152]. Thomas believes that emphasis on science and the rational is taking precedence over the preferred uncertainty of our perceptions of God: these are the new preachers who help us to make sense of our world from their perspective: 'Our scientists ... preached to us/from their space-stations, calling us/to consider the clockwork birds/and fabricated lilies, how they/also, as they were conditioned to/do, were neither toiling nor spinning'[153]. In this perversion of the Sermon on the Mount, scientists would set themselves up as our new saviours, give us a new religion; they would take over from God

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the spiritual destitution of contemporary agriculture, and is a kind of Welsh lament, Thomas denoting change and loss by way of the name of a proud prince being used to describe a deceived labourer, representing the desecration of myth and the ascendancy of harsh reality into a present devoid of honour and magic.

[146] 'Decentred' from Residues (2002)

[147] 'Movement' from Bread (1963); but movement without due consideration of consequences - 'The council has already newly felled the row of beech trees near Llanbedrog that gave Lôn Crugan a special character. The excuse was the same. Safety. That is to say, widening the road so that motorists can go ever faster. Arriving, not enjoying the journey, is everything today' Auto (1997) p147 (cf Hopkins' 'Binsey Poplars'); also Hopkins' Journal entry for April 8, 1873: 'The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscape of the world destroyed any more ...' House (1959) p230

[148] 'This One' from Experimenting (1986); 'the most common sight was the rows of cars and the motorists with their heads in newspapers swallowing the petty news of the materialist world' Auto (1997) p76

[149] 'Digest' in H'm (1972)

[150] 'Digest' *ibid*

[151] 'The Refusal' from Mass (1992)

[152] Auto (1997) p170

[153] 'Eschatology' from Mass (1992)

and create new life with their 'white coats,/working away in their bookless/laboratories, ministrants/in that ritual beyond words/which is the Last Sacrament of the species'[154].

Thomas's complex critique of our modern reality, envisioning a damaging forward momentum of progress that remains unquestioned by the majority, leads naturally to his proposition of what should be in its place. Wheels go no faster than what pulls them[155] and he asks us to decide what is 'missing' from the machine[156]. He expects us to work out what has been lost in the embracing of futureworld, supplying no answers, but supporting the fact that the questions should be asked. One could posit the replies, 'faith' and 'God' to his questions, but we need to question ourselves in the process: 'Why/can we not be taught/there is no hill beyond this one/we roll our minds to the top/of'[157]. Can we not understand that 'progress' is a Sisyphean endeavour, that we do ourselves no favours by it? Can we recognise that there is something embedded in man that means he cannot rest content where he is? Are we able to lament the fact that something continually fuels our thirst for knowledge which means we perennially eat of the Tree and continually 'fall' by neither recognising the Eden that we have, nor the unprogressable position we already hold 'half-way/up between earth and heaven'?

In discussing such questions, Thomas returns to the idea of perception, for the answers we get depend upon how we look. Thomas sees the birds, for 'Watching them fly/Is my business'. He watches them *not* as a scientist would, counting their returns to the rafters or sifting their droppings, or recording the wave-lengths of their screaming[158]. His 'method' is to live with them through their hours and seasons, letting his senses fill with their movement. He perceives the inter-connection that upholds all living creatures, despite the fact that the martins' home is very different to his. Both Thomas and they have a home, and both return to it, although differently. Thomas sees himself as being within the processes of nature, not apart from them; he as unique human is a microcosmic part of a larger macrocosmic life. He understands that it is in him that the birds fly, build their nests, bring up their young, and return to after their migration. In truly experiencing, and loving, what they do, he partakes of the sacrament of their lives. It is this understanding of inter-connection, of annihilation of difference, that closes the gap between the 'seer' and the 'seen' and this bridge between the two is the 'site inviolate' which unites two components appearing externally at odds. Thomas is analysing the criteria by which we

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[154] 'Ritual' in Experimenting (1986); it is significant here that books have been taken away, made redundant
[155] 'Perspectives' in Later Poems (1983)
[156] 'Reply' in Experimenting (1986)
[157] 'Stations' from Mass (1992)
[158] 'The Place' from Flowers (1968)

perceive. He is arguing that there is a right (healthy) and a wrong (damaging) way to look and see, to name and understand.

Thomas positions himself in opposition to the coldness of a science that calculates the 'atomic weight' of Jacob and reduces love to an equation: 'when love is divided by love/there is no remainder'[159]. He counterpoints 'science' with 'love', proposing that we laud the kind of love that watches and appreciates life's 'selving'[160] by being naturally what it is and what it does, and deprecate the kind of clinical endeavour that counts, sifts, records, analyses, and often harms as a result – for such ways provide only limited and limiting answers. Blake would agree with this. In visual terms he represents these polarities by way of Urizen trapped and staring down into the material hell of his own creation, the division of matter by Newton's compasses that reduces and entraps man, as against the freedom of the outward, upward gaze of Los as he dances with the sun in his hand, empowered to follow his imagination and discover new unlimited worlds. Thomas is asking us to follow him in an interactive journey that is similar to the parabola of perception he asked us to follow with respect to Prytherch – the movement *from* one way of 'perceiving' that is merely damaging and limiting, that parts and dissects leading only to 'boxed' vision, *to* another which is effectively a search for imaginative meaning, an enhancement of distance and vista. He works not as a man 'vowed' to science, but as a man 'vowed' to spirit - its elucidation, the evocation of it as a force of underlying interconnection between the various and disparate external 'realities' of our world[161].

In eschatological terms, with its dearth of spirit, Thomas sees humanity becoming merely 'cracked cisterns' that hold no water either spiritual or earthly. God, seeking us, can only look into a dry chalice, feeling the cold touch of the machine on his hand. He calls us, only to seek himself among his own creations: the dumb cogs and tireless camshafts that are left[162]. God pleads: 'I am the live God ... I thirst, I thirst/for the spring water. Draw it up/for me from your heart's well'[163] – but man has gone and cannot respond.

Thomas' critique of society can be said to be prophetic in that he carries out, as a prophet would, a critical function on our behalf. His irascible scolding of us aims to be didactic in

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[159] 'This at the bottom ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[160] cf 'As kingfishers catch fire' by Hopkins: Gardner (1967) No 57 p90, which also discusses this way of perception and provides a revelation of an holistic energy coursing through all things that is nature 'selving'; cf also Dylan Thomas: 'The force that through the green fuse' Dylan Thomas (1993) p13
[161] "The new knowledge, physics especially, has reduced matter to a state of thin vapour like a current that connects two electric charges' Auto (1997) p145 – Thomas himself acts as the current that bridges the gap between matter and spirit, between all that is empirically perceived and the self that does the perceiving.
[162] 'God's Story' from Laboratories (1975)
[163] 'Ann Griffith' *ibid*

order to effect change and reorientation, so that he might save even one of the gamblers at the foot of the cross. Thomas watches through the 'gaps' that exist in our lives with a 'resolving vision', the use of the 'heart' or empathy proposed as mediator to bridge 'difference' and alienation between one another, man and God, man and nature, and ultimately, by way of critical self-analysis, man and himself. Thomas believes we *can* cross the 'abyss' with an idea. He uses his own journey from condemnation to acceptance - through a religious process of penitence, confession, forgiveness, and absolution - to empower us to effect change by example, proposing that perspective is important: how we look determines what we see, and by what criteria we judge. Thomas perceives man's thirst for knowledge and progress as an endemic and ongoing enactment of 'Fall' but believes that all onward journeys are merely circular and whatever we do we come back to, literally, face ourselves. He worries, and exhorts us to guard against, the fact that we are too busy travelling to see the journey; too keen to grasp progress (personified by the machine and the 'catch all' word 'science') to see what we leave behind at its expense. He believes that we are in the process of throwing God, spirit, and an holistic view of life overboard in our rush to promote an egocentrism that divides, and that we are greedy for (empty) materiality at the cost of our souls. His poetics thus far comprise a spiritual debate about value: by what criteria we judge. He proposes a reality of diachronic and eternal meaning underpinning and stabilising all flux and ephemerality in the (synchronic) present. Thomas argues for life and not its negation, in spite of its real harshnesses and the 'imperfections' of humanity.

III

Prophetic activity can also be identified by the phenomenon of compulsion. Thomas bears witness to this, speaking of the Welsh hill farmers: 'You will still continue ... To affront, bewilder, yet compel my gaze'[164], intimating that even although he found it hard to 'look' at these people in their entirety with all their habits, prejudices, and 'uncouthness' intact, in some sense he could literally not tear his eyes away. Their unravelling story with which he kept pace in his various parishes, compelled and mesmerised him, forcing him to record it as a living lesson of the 'transactions' we all must undertake with one another. He articulates this as if he never had the choice *not* to be on such a mission: 'Compulsion and choice,/contending champions;/co-respondents in a case/not for the courts;/curious as to whether free/one can be compelled to choose'[165].

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[164] 'A Priest to His People' from Stones (1946)
[165] 'Anybody's Alphabet' in No Truce (1995)

In the same way that he is compelled to gaze on and articulate the lives of the hill people, he is compelled to interact with his God. Thomas's God is a great absence that is paradoxically a presence which compels him to address it without hope of a reply[166]. Thomas also feels compelled to 'name' him in order that he can 'identify' him so that he both incorporates and understands. He returns to the issue of language in man's comprehension of, and relationship with, 'difference': we have 'a syntactical/compulsion to incorporate/him in the second person'[167]. The word 'you' circumscribes a relationship with 'I' and it places ourselves in juxtaposition with the 'other'. In this way we make God 'fit' our language, which is our articulation of vision and our way of 'domesticating' him and 'in-corporating' him within our world. By way of language we give God body, making him corporeal because we cannot do anything else. Thomas engages with this perspective: 'The I as idea/incarnate, inimical/to the impartial, infinite/in the intensity of its/opposition to the incursions/of an implicit Thou'[168]. He argues that the difficulty with prayer is the exchange of place between the 'I' and the 'thou' with only silence being the answer to an imagined request[169]. God may be conceived as 'the second person' grammatically as well as figuratively, but Thomas believes that his apostrophes are to himself only - when he leans closer to his God, he finds the second person does not exist[170], for it is the nominative that is important[171] because the nominative is God[172]. God is, literally, in the self, is the self. According to Thomas there are penalties to division, a surrendering to the belief that we are not whole[173] for we are all, and all things are, of the 'first person': 'This was the spirit/brooding on the face of the waters,/knowing there would be no reflection/there other than of itself'. This view makes of everything created, a part of the being of the 'first person' of God, a repetition in time of 'the eternal/I AM'[174], the infinite echo of 'I AM' being simply the God who is, whose mind is its own fountain, that overflows[175].

Searching for the face of God, the representation of God here on earth, Thomas concedes that it is himself he courts, that the face he seeks, vague but compelling, is a replica of his own face hungry for meaning at life's pane[176]. He conceives of God as the mirror of the

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[166] 'The Absence' in Frequencies (1978)
[167] 'I know him ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[168] 'Anybody's Alphabet' from No Truce (1995)
[169] 'S.K.' *ibid*
[170] 'Sonata in X' from Mass (1992)
[171] 'First Person' *ibid*
[172] 'I' *ibid*
[173] 'First Person' *ibid*
[174] 'A Thicket in Lleyn' in Experimenting (1986); cf Coleridge: Chapter 13 of Biographia Literaria (1983): 'The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'; cf also Exodus 3: 14: 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM'.
[175] 'The God' from Mass (1992)
[176] 'It is one ...' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)

self, the mirror which compels his gaze just as life compels his gaze, his perception of deity within, alive to the fact that when we forget who we are, and descend deep into corporeality, becoming fully human rather than fully divine – this is when sin and pain happen. When we let go of our divine part, we descend to earth rather than rise toward heaven.

In order to understand Thomas's 'truth' we are commanded to 'study'[177] and 'consider'[178]. He wants us to be active in our investigations. We have to 'bend' and 'peer', 'look' and 'see', 'notice' and 'tell' and 'think'[179]. Thomas is both the message and the messenger, sign and signifier, compelled to see, compelled to tell, one who compels in his turn. God gave him his 'X-ray' eyes for him to use, in order to discover the non-malignancy of love's growth[180] because 'life' operated on him 'with a green scalpel'. Love is not a tumour to be cut out of the corporeal body. Thomas believes in truth and love as empathic ideals we can aim for in life. He is compelled to hold a dialogue with us, the reader, who is always implicit within his poetics as an addressee, in order that such possibilities may be posited as both desirable and real, and to incorporate the reader's experience within his poetics of journey, his theology of place. Thomas aligns himself with us: 'we never awaken/from the compulsiveness of the mind's/stare into the lenses' furious interiors'[181], linking his own personal perspective with our endeavours as we compulsively seek, but from his point of view, the wrong things in the wrong places. He believes that we are all mesmerised by life, that life itself, its atoms, its smallest components hidden within exterior form fix their gaze on us, a gaze we are compelled to return[182]. This relationship is the respect we give the things with which we share the world, that makes of existence itself an ever-renewed symphony ongoing in diachronic time even as we perform it synchronically in all our quotidians 'on whatever instruments/the generations put into our hands'. This makes of human experience a long chain of being, which we are but singular manifestations of, and Thomas seeks to compel our broken, singular, subjective vision towards wholeness, unity and integration.

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[177] 'Man and Tree' in Stones (1946)
[178] 'Affinity' *ibid*
[179] 'The Labourer' & 'Farm Child' in Land (1952); cf also 'Come close ...' from 'Incarnation' section of Counterpoint (1990); 'Fugue for Ann Griffiths' from Welsh Airs (1987); and 'Meet the Family' in Poetry (1958)
[180] 'The Message' in Destinations (1985)
[181] 'Probing' in Laboratories (1975)
[182] 'Andante' from Experimenting (1986); cf Hopkins' comment : 'What you look hard at seems to look hard at you' Journal entry 1871: House (1959) p204

IV

In order to promulgate such prophetic stances, transactions, realignments, critiques, any prophet (including Thomas and the other poets here considered) has to work within (and against) given contexts of time and place that comprise the wider societal reality he inhabits and 'forthtells'. In Thomas's case this was rural 20th century Wales. Thomas was keenly aware of context: 'There was a context/in which I lived; unseen forces/acted upon me ... There was a larger pattern/we worked at ... a power guided/my hand'[183]. Interaction with context is a prerequisite for prophetic activity, and Thomas considers the loss and erosion[184] of the Welsh people, their culture and language, through the lenses of history, myth, poetry and invasion, and sets these against the wider contextual world of movement, progress and change that threatens to consume. His own poetics become the media of reclamation and preservation as Thomas tries to hold onto, and 'fix' in place things of value which he sees disappearing before his eyes. He seeks to raise our consciousness of what is happening to Wales, to its identity, in order that we might apply such perceptions to our own worlds, to the 'larger pattern', broadening our understanding of current life in juxtaposition with a receding past: 'Ignorance of the sheer otherness of Wales is something R S spent ... his lifetime exposing'[185]. Thomas's own view of Wales as 'this country/of failure'[186] shows that he believes Wales is somehow to blame for its own degradation and oppression, mainly through apathy. Thomas's poetry attempts to describe the lives of the Welsh hill farmers 'with a keen perception that their way of life is rooted in a fragile past, so that even as he studies them they seem sometimes to be disappearing from his view'[187].

Thomas portrays the loss and erosion of context through the lens of history 'The Rising of Glyndwr'[188] gives us access to Wales' ancestral past. The portrayal of individuals like Owain Glyndŵr, the last native Prince of Wales, helps to root his poetry into a mythical golden past when the people were 'taut for war'[189], yet the 'ultimate stand' was not fighting, but language, 'declaiming verse/To the sharp prompting of the harp'. Thomas proposes that it is through the erosion of language that the past is effaced. He carries his Welshness with

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[183] 'In Context' from Frequencies (1978)
[184] "The rector began to write poetry longing for the old order, and for the poor and lonely life of the few who had remained ... But in addition a political element came into his poetry, together with a great deal of bitterness because of the English oppression' Auto (1997) p58
[185] Auto (1997) Introduction pxix
[186] 'The Bush' in Later Poems (1983)
[187] See Wintle (1996) p152
[188] from Stones (1946)
[189] 'Welsh History' in Land (1952)

him into English territory, and feels a stranger there; he is not one of the public[190] because the public are English but he has had to 'come a long way' to realise this. He thinks of the Welsh hills and history, of Bosworth Field, but believes that the Welsh are blind to their new battle now which is that of loss of identity. Much of Thomas's historicism involves what he sees as English oppression, and he asks where he can go to escape the smell of decay and the putrefying of a dead nation. He watches the English scavenging among the remains of Welsh culture, covering them over like a tide and elbowing their language into the grave they themselves have dug for it[191].

In this way, Thomas reacts against 'the despair/Of men ... Fretting under the barbed sting/Of English law, starving among/The sleek woods no longer theirs'[192]. In order to tackle such contextual political themes, Thomas reverts to Welsh mythology and lineage, that of 'old princes in whose veins/Swelled the same blood that sweetened mine', and this he finds re-animating and reinvigorating, and he hopes that this will affect 'the larger pattern' of readers and Wales and foster a resurrection of nationality, ideas of nationhood and the reclamation of identity. He wants to reverse the effect of 'Rhiannon's birds'. He aims to wake-up a sleepy nation[193], and try and help them regain their ancient character in the present instead of being a people who have been bred on legends, and who warm their hands at the fire of the past[194]. He wants the Welsh to see that their proud family tree stretches from the past to the present and can enthuse the now, rather than the Welsh continually thinking they were a people, and are no longer. He blames the Welsh for concentrating on the past to no good avail, castigating them for their inability[195] yet he acknowledges that the Welsh are a poor people[196] and that contemporary Welsh life comprises impossible choices, to stay in rural poverty working the land, or to go to the towns where the pound holds sway[197]. He posits the reality that the Welsh are willing to betray anything in order to be pragmatic and ensure they can earn: 'Anything to/sell? cries the tourist/to the native rummaging among/the remnants of his self-respect'[198]. He

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[190] 'A Welshman at St James' Park' in Pietà (1966)
[191] 'Reservoirs' in Flowers (1968)
[192] 'The Tree' (Owain Glyn Dŵr Speaks) from Land (1952)
[193] re Rhiannon's birds Thomas refers to: 'the old tale of how the listener would, on hearing them, forget time' Auto (1997) p64; cf references in poetry: 'Maes-yr-Onnen' & 'The Tree' in Land (1952); cf also Blake: **Figure 19** Jerusalem Plate [41] 46 'Albions sleep' Thames & Hudson (2000) p343 - Blake too wanted to wake up Albion from lethargy and torpor
[194] 'Welsh History' *ibid*
[195] 'Welsh Landscape' *ibid*
[196] 'Loyalties' from Flowers (1968)
[197] 'Invitation' in H'm (1972); cf also: 'look at yourself/Now, a servant hired to flog/The life out of the slow soil,/Or come obediently as a dog/To the pound's whistle' 'Too Late' in Tares (1961)
[198] 'If You Can Call it Living' from What is a Welshman? (1974)

conceives of the Welsh as beggars holding their caps out and counting the few casual coins they are cast[199].

Thomas laments the fact that 'Welsh culture, which to a great extent is inseparable from the Welsh language, is in mortal danger'[200]. The Welsh are expatriates even in their own country, for they have left the land 'For the jewelled pavements' and seen their tongue overlayered with English[201]. When Thomas moved to Flintshire in 1940, 'in effect to the heart of the English plains', he realised what he had done: 'That was not my place, on the plain amongst Welshmen with English accents and attitudes. I set about learning Welsh, in order to be able to return to the true Wales of my imagination'[202]. He saw 'The Old Language'[203] as being Welsh, yet the speech of his fathers was a stranger at his lips[204]. Thomas's stance is against Englishness, against a greater political power, and he mourns for the passing of language, with its contemporary effects. The children have a supplanted language passed on to them whilst the old language of soft consonants, once familiar, now appears strange and unfamiliar[205]. Thomas, literally, watches as the Welsh language is eroded until there are not many speakers of the Welsh tongue left: 'I looked on and/there was one less and one less and one less'[206]. However, his return to the 'true Wales of his imagination' retains elements of myth and romanticism which point to the existence of something that did not really exist, and shows an unwillingness on Thomas's part to truly face up to the harsh erosion which is consistently the state of the present, the crucible of losses and gains.

Such contextual loss and erosion take place within a wider moving world of change and progress. It is Thomas's intention to attend to things as they are now, in the present, and this is where his prophetic critique or forthtelling takes place: 'I will attend rather/To things as they are: to green grass/That is not ours; to visitors/Buying us up ... an Elsan culture/Threatens us'[207]. Here is an unambiguous (political) perception of current affairs, and it shows where his attention is orientated. He knows many things are vanishing; even the representative Welshman/hill-man, Prytherch, becomes lost in the sweep of progress: 'where is the face/with the crazed eyes that through the unseen/drizzle of its tears looked

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[199] 'Traeth Maelgwn' in Flowers (1968)
[200] Auto (1997) p21
[201] 'Expatriates' in Poetry (1958); 'The language had to battle on two fronts: against the oppression of the English state and its civil service; and also – the shame of it – against the Welsh themselves' Auto (1997) p93
[202] Auto (1997) p10
[203] from Land (1952)
[204] Considered for the position of vicar of Eglwys-fach in 1954, Thomas wanted to move from Manafon 'from the desire to secure a Welsh-speaking parish' for 'He had been in Manafon for twelve years and had grown tired there' Auto (1997) p62
[205] 'Welsh Landscape' in Land (1952)
[206] 'Drowning' in Welsh Airs (1987)
[207] 'Looking at Sheep' in Bread (1963)

out/on this land'[208]. Thomas watches carefully what occurs around him, perceiving markers of change[209]. He sees Welshmen who have lost their identity until only Welsh names survive: 'Rhodri Theophilus Owen'[210] moves in a city landscape of dust, 'three Owens' in the house, with no connection to homeland. Similarly, 'Walter Llywrch'[211], who despite being born in Wales and having a Welsh surname doesn't seem to know who he is and he passes his despair, his lack of identity, on to his children, new generations moving further and further away from their roots.

Along with the erosion of Welsh identity, language and character, Thomas also works within (and against) a loss of spirit and the concomitant context of religious erosion. This is the situation of a small beleaguered nation, as ancient Israel was, standing bravely but being inevitably overwhelmed by bigger tides, larger changes, and a more powerful culture. Thomas compares the old gothic cathedrals with their beauty which reflected past faith, with what happens now[212], implying that we are inheritors but are not benefactors. Current wisdom seems to reside in a revision of spiritual codes[213], and in revision many things can be lost. He questions that the emptiness of our culture is a reflection of the emptiness of our religion[214], and Thomas conjoins the changing use of language within the liturgy to such emptying of wisdom, as if by grasping hold of tradition and stasis, one could prevent modernity and movement. Ward feels that 'Bleak Liturgies'[215] reflects a general concern about the state of ecclesiastical language in the modern era, whereby the church is ravaged not only by the media but by 'transport, design, cacophony and much else'[216]. These point to the workings of the church being deeply affected by a changing and progressing world. A bitter note infiltrates Thomas' ongoing personal engagement with the changing face of religion: 'Come to Wales/To be buried ... a place where/It is lovely to lie'[217], a bitterness that sees the use of churches only for inevitable burials, 'This is what/Chapels are for', 'How they endow/Our country with their polished/Memorials'. Does he tell us that through erosion of infrastructure, in terms of architecture and the architectonics of the liturgy, we lose spirit itself? That somehow these things are precious vessels for spirit, and through their disappearance the spirit disappears?

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[208] 'Gone?' in Frequencies (1978)
[209] 'Afforestation' in Bread (1963)
[210] 'Rhodri' from Pietà (1966)
[211] from Tares (1961)
[212] 'Art History' in Flowers (1968)
[213] 'Digest' in H'm (1972)
[214] 'Two Views of Olympos' in Residues (2002)
[215] from Mass (1992)
[216] See Ward (2001) p183
[217] 'Welcome to Wales' in Flowers (1968)

To counteract and counterpoint all such contextual losses and erosions, Thomas posits the power of poetry itself as a medium of both reclamation and preservation. Speaking 'Welsh words' which have the power to open 'the concealed wounds/Of history in the comfortable flesh', he believes that words are capable of awakening history and its pain in the hearer. Words can 'jolt' the reader out of complacency and jaded vision, and reanimate him, reawaken him to renewed perception. Thomas sees language as a powerful force, and in this sense he himself is 'The Patriot' who has the 'rare gift' which might 'inflame/The mind and heart of the hearer'. Thomas believes that the poetic and prophetic gift[218] has the power of 'fierceness' with its 'huge entry/At the ear's porch'. Thus he writes a Mass for hard times, to counterpoint losses of spiritual architecture with gains in spiritual poetry[219].

Thomas is deliberate in his poetic tropes of reclamation and preservation. He uses Welsh that is complicitous with those who speak it, and actively works against those who speak English[220]. Speakers of English are deliberately excluded so that they are made aware of 'difference' through nationality, history and language, and in this way Thomas uses language to preserve 'Welshness' in the face of perceived assault. See for example: 'Eryr Pengwern, penngarn llwyt heno'[221], also: 'Mi sydd fachgen ifanc, ffôl,/Yn byw yn ôl fy ffansi'[222], and the epigraph to 'Those Others' in Tares. Language being a marker of identity and nationhood, reclaims the past[223]. Thomas also uses Welsh names, 'Gruffudd Llwyd'[224] and 'Ysbaddaden Penkawr'[225], for example, to effect the same thing. He is also deliberate about using Welsh settings with respect to place names ('Bwlch-y-Fedwen; Nant-yr-Eira; Ty'n-y-Fawnog'[226]) and using historical references to provide diachronic continuity and a link with past history that places people in juxtaposition with Welsh soil: 'The place, Hyddgen ... the fifth/Century since Glyn Dŵr/Was here with his men'[227].

Thomas' poetry works within and against these contexts of loss and erosion, but also provides a context for hopefulness: that Welshness will not be lost, that his articulations of the complexities of Welsh history, culture, character and personality, as well as its failures and its ongoing battles with progress and change, can live on and not die. The Welsh may be a people wasting themselves in fruitless battles, their kinds dead and their bards

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[218] See 'The Patriot' in Bread (1963)
[219] 'What you lose on the clerical swings you gain on the poetic roundabout' Poetry Wales (Spring 1972) p50
[220] When he chose to live in the Llŷn Peninsula for his retiral in 1978, 'For the first time in his life R.S. was now in a parish where he could use the language with almost everyone, every single day' Auto (1997) p71
[221] 'Border Blues' in Poetry (1958)
[222] 'Border Blues' *ibid*
[223] 'On Hearing a Welshman Speak' in Poetry (1958)
[224] 'The Tree' in Land (1952)
[225] 'Border Blues' in Poetry (1958)
[226] 'The Welsh Hill Country' in Land (1952)
[227] 'Hyddgen' in Tares (1961)

perished[228] yet he sees them as a people still, who will arise. Thomas, in his prophetic exploration of context is attempting to ensure that something endures and is untouchable despite change. He believes that language has the power to retain, and to fix-in-place, that it has an elemental property, diachronic in its continuity despite synchronic failure and flux. The English can come in, and can come in a long way, the Welsh can't stop them[229] but all inroads made into a culture must, and can only, stop at the 'old bar of speech'. This is the case with religion too – inroads and erosions can only stop at the bar of language[230]. The Welsh may have learned English, but it is their ancient language which saves them, even as it is dying. The old language is priceless and cannot be bought – there is no way to it past town and factory which have 'fallen' to the English, for it exists, untouchable, in 'the cold bud of water/In the hard rock': an elemental source that still feeds and is stubbornly protected, water as spiritual and bodily food that will keep the Welsh body alive, Thomas's poetry being the rock of its salvation[231]. Despite all contextual erosion, Thomas perceives colonialism as a lost cause[232]. The English gentry who owned the people and the land are gradually dying out, for they lived a dying way of life with their ignorant confidence that the future would not be insubordinate. The Welsh by contrast remain indefatigable in their natural presence: 'the Welsh/are here, picknicking among the ruins'.

V

In order to discuss the issue of authority within Thomas's poetry, we might borrow Shelley's view of poets as unacknowledged legislators, and consider this as support of Thomas's prophetic endeavour which is carried out for the benefit of the world, one that judges and articulates, balances and 'tells forth' the way things are in order that people's minds can be changed, their allegiances altered. This is authoritative promulgation of an 'unofficial' justice that judges by moral, religious, ethical, ideals: proposes the rule of God's law rather than the support of man's[233]. John Guillory in Poetic Authority states that

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[228] 'Welsh History' from Land (1952)
[229] 'Welcome' from Bread (1963)
[230] 'It pains me greatly, but ever since the Church reformed the Liturgy, I cannot partake of the Sacrament' 'A Year in Llŷn' from Auto (1997) p131
[231] "The poem in the rock and/The poem in the mind/Are not one./It was in dying/I tried to make them so.' 'Epitaph' from Poetry (1958). This sees Thomas attempting to unify disparate things via an alternate medium that expresses both: poetry. The mind that perceives and expresses can be the bridge between the 'selving' of the material world and our experience of it – the poet 'dies' to himself in order to become one with something other. The epitaph is also Thomas's own 'rock' after his death. The poetry he leaves behind is his own stone marker.
[232] 'Plas Difancoll' in Later Poems (1983)
[233] cf Yeats' comment that 'Every argument carries us backwards to some religious conception, and in the end the creative energy of men depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but as an image in a looking-glass' Samhain (1970) p17; cf also Coleridge: 'truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end' of poetry Biographia Literaria (1983) Ch 14 p12

authors themselves are epicentres of significant upheavals[234], that words can shake our ground and make it less solid, and he argues that the closure of the biblical canon which restricted religious and poetic possibilities, simultaneously ensured the life of an even more extreme defense of authority, that of 'an ancient figure': inspiration[235]. This is the force which asserts the authority of the poetic text by 'invoking the participation of divinity in its production'[236]. With respect to poets, Guillory proposes that they do not easily relinquish the 'immemorial association' of poetry with vision and prophecy which are its 'sacred origins'[237]. Thomas agrees: 'I went down to Ty'n Parc lane and saw the dew hanging from the branches, and heard the redpoll and the siskin going past. And without warning and without effort a little poem formed in my mind. It is so lovely when they come of their own accord like this'[238]. Thomas also believes in, and articulates, the authority of the ancient bards: 'something in his song/Stopped me, held me; the bright harp/Was strung with fire, the music burned'[239]. The bard has the power to sow a seed in the brain[240]. Thomas also connects such experiences with the figure for divine inspiration, the breath of wind: 'the faint breeze/From heaven freshens and I roll in it'[241]. He deliberately aligns himself with the bardic tradition of Taliesin, a 6th century poet[242] whom he uses as his *auctor*, and within whose lineage Thomas exists as the latest evocation[243]: 'Taliesin still, I show you a new world, risen,/Stubborn with beauty, out of the heart's need'[244]. The poem 'Taliesin 1952' mirrors the form, vocabulary, and repetitions of The Hanes Taliesin

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[234] Guillory (1983) Preface pvii
[235] Guillory (1983) Preface pviii
[236] cf Thomas' own discussion about inspiration vs perspiration in 'Poetry for Supper' from Poetry (1958) where he states that: 'verse should be as natural/As the small tuber that feeds on muck/And grows slowly from obtuse soil/To the white flower of immortal beauty' as against the idea that 'you must sweat/And rhyme your guts taut, if you'd build/Your verse a ladder'.
[237] Guillory (1983) p177
[238] Auto (1997) p165 (cf Hopkins' comment to Bridges: letter XLV 16 July, 1878 from 114 Mount Street: 'The Hurrahing Sonnet was the outcome of half an hour of extreme enthusiasm as I walked home alone one day from fishing in the Elwy' Abbott (1935) p56); cf Thomas: 'It is lovely to think of inspiration, that 'Pan y myn y daw,/Fel yr enfys a'r glaw', 'It comes when it wills,/Like the rainbow and the rain'. And certainly, as with a poem, it is thus that He sometimes chooses to come' Auto (1997) p166
[239] 'The Tree' from Land (1952)
[240] 'The Tree' *ibid*
[241] 'Chapel Deacon' in Poetry (1958)
[242] 'The historic Taliesin of the late sixth century, a group of whose authentic poems is contained in the Red Book of Hergest, and who is noticed by Nennius, in a quotation from a seventh-century genealogy of the Saxon Kings, as 'renowned in British poetry'' Robert Graves. The White Goddess. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1961. p74
[243] re the concept of *auctor*: Longinus: 'From the natural genius of those old writers there flows into the hearts of their admirers as it were an emanation from those holy mouths. Inspired by this, even those who are not easily moved to prophecy share the enthusiasm of these others' grandeur' Aristotle. Poetics. Tr. & Ed. S Halliwell, incl: Longinus. On the Sublime. Tr. W H Fyfe. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995. p213; cf Hosea using antecedent prophets as a source for his own writing: 'I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets' Hosea 12: 10; T S Eliot comments: 'No poet, no artist of any act, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' Selected Essays (1934) 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' p15; as Auden said of Yeats: 'The words of a dead man/Are modified in the guts of the living' Auden (1979) 'In Memory of W B Yeats' p81; Shelley comments: poetry produced by the individual is merely 'episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world' Defense (1891) p23; in Virgil's 'Eclogue VI' 69-73, the Muses give Gallus Hesiod's reed pipe, symbolic of them handing-on to him Hesiod's gift of song and his vocation as poet. Virgil. The Eclogues. Tr. Guy Lee. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1984. pp73-4 – the poem subtly reinforces the idea that Virgil himself takes on the mantle of gift and vocation in his turn; cf also Titus 1: 9 & I Cor 15: 3.
[244] 'Taliesin 1952' from R S Thomas. Selected Poems (1946-1968). London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Ltd, 1973.

riddle[245]: 'Primary chief bard am I to Elphin ... I was with my Lord ... I have been ... I was in ... I have witnessed'. Compare Thomas's 'I have been all men ... I have seen ... I have been ... I have known'. Thomas appropriates an ancient Welsh bardic heritage, ensuring that as inheritor, a past tradition still lives on through his words as vehicles for reclamation and preservation.

Thomas's faith in his poetry is his faith in his own authority, revealed through his compulsion to see and have us see, his didactic imperatives to us and the imperatives of his religion. He authoritatively provides us with revelations about life which he perceives as 'the metabolism/of the being of love' which reflects God[246], and he equates this with his service to God which is everywhere discussed within his poetics. He strives for discontinuity, a 'significant upheaval' to fracture our preconceptions of 'what is' in order to allow the space for 'what should be' to enter into our lives. He discusses where God is (and is not) and how his spirit, as the fiery element perceived by Hopkins, charges and upholds life in the large and the small, all things revealing God's workmanship. This is Thomas's creative endeavour, which comprises statements of faith, belief and vision and the authority which emanates from these. He attempts to persuade us in the way that Scripture does, by accessing its moral ideal, and proposing choice, orientation, motivation as prime movers, and fulfilling as Guillory claims, the tenet that ''Literature as scripture' has for very long been the ground of poetic authority'[247].

His authority to speak is also grounded in his view of himself and his words as a 'medium' or conduit to God, with Thomas as spokesman: the poet works 'In the silence/that is his chosen medium/of communication' and he tells others about it in words[248]. Critics agree: poetry such as Thomas's only begins when the world seizes the man passing and plants itself within him like a seed. Such an annunciation can be seen as a sacrament which it is the poet's duty not to kill, and which makes of the poet its medium[249]. Similarly, as our 'medium' or 'spokesman' Thomas must also plead our case before God. In both ways Thomas emerges as a prophetic protestor as well as a prophetic mediator[250]. Thomas articulates these duties: 'Daily I take their side/In their quarrel, calling their faults/Mine. How do I serve so/This being they have shut out/Of their houses, their thoughts, their lives?'[251]. Thomas takes to himself the role of representative, compelled to do so: 'I am at

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[245] Reproduced in Graves (1961) p81, Lady Charlotte Guest's translation.
[246] 'Alive' in Laboratories (1975)
[247] Guillory (1983) Preface pviii
[248] 'The New Mariner' from Between (1981)
[249] Bedient (1974) p55
[250] Phillips (1986) p65
[251] 'They' in Flowers (1968)

the switchboard/of the exchanges of the people/of all time, receiving their messages/whether I will or no'[252]. He conceives of his prophetic role as both receiver and transmitter, a medium or instrument which puts one voice in touch with another[253]. Wintle agrees with this view of Thomas's role, believing that poetry is an 'inherently serious occupation' because it is effectively the conduit between God and Man[254]. The title of one of Thomas's collections Frequencies (1978) gives the connotation of dial and wavelength, of 'tuning-in' to words from the ether, linking with the denotative idea of 'tuning-in' to inspiration from God. But listening to God's words is a dangerous activity, one of Thomas' dialogues with God witnessing that a God's words are for their own sake, and the hearer hears only at his peril, and many go mad in the mastering of his medium[255]. Thomas witnesses to his experience of being 'used' as a medium by God[256], believing that it is not he who looks, but he who is looked through, as if God uses his eyes to see the world[257], and uses his bodily ability to transmit messages from God to man[258].

VI

Thomas's physical eyes are crucial to an understanding of his poetics for they are the media for both sight and understanding, and this brings us back to the issues of perspective and perception, sight and visionary experience, for it is *how* we look that determines *what* we see. If one uses 'brute eyes' one will only see 'brutish' things[259]. Eyes are what cross the gap, they are the media to holistic 'closure', the things that integrate or separate, that unite or divide; this makes of the poet and his words, which translate what the eyes see, into the effective sparks which cross the gap and connect the current. In so doing the poet himself is displaced and marginalised in order that he can effect unification in others. Thomas may be only a priest on his church porch, like anyone else a man with ears and eyes[260], yet he is simultaneously 'other', for this back is turned on the interior world to look outward at a universe that does not know him, and he keeps his place there, as our

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[252] 'Present' from Frequencies (1978)

[253] cf Cecil Day Lewis who conceives of the poet as 'A wireless station: masts rooted in earth, stretching towards heaven, sensitive to the horizontal waves of sound: an instrument receptive of the messages that crowd the air: another instrument, translating these messages out of code into a universal language, selecting and co-ordinating them, transmitting them to whosoever will turn a dial. The poet listens in to his universe' from Cecil Day Lewis. A Hope for Poetry. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947. p75

[254] Wintle (1996) p308

[255] 'Shadows' from Frequencies (1978)

[256] cf Guillory (1983) p18: 'The belief of the sacred poet must be that each choice dissolves into the inevitability of the already chosen; no choice is successful except the emptying of the will before God, the choice not to choose for oneself but to be the instrument of the providential will'

[257] 'Gloria' section from 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)

[258] cf Guillory (1983) p20: 'The poet is for [Milton] the perfect mediator who usurps nothing because the authority of the message is absolute, a sacred text'.

[259] 'On a Portrait' in Stones (1946)

[260] 'The Porch' in Frequencies (1978)

representative, on a 'lean' threshold, neither outside nor in[261]. This is confrontation of consciousness, the threshold of the moment where experience, absorption, cusp of gap and merge come together and the result is silence, for no answer comes. Thomas is our representative in that he becomes our helplessness in the face of the unknown and the silence as we wait for the withheld answer to all of our insoluble problems[262]. The meaning, for Thomas, is in the waiting, the waiting itself our answer.

Thomas relies heavily on his own 'insightedness', his own vision of direct experience. He has seen it all: theft, murder, rape, the 'rueful acts' of our blind hands. To articulate these, he seeks the poem in the pain, and has learned that to absorb, silence is best, but one pays for absorption with one's conscience. He becomes merely eyes, 'witnessing virtue's defeat'[263]. Yet in that poetic witness, Thomas is not silent in the face of evil and oppression. He speaks words directly at the reader, and he also witnesses to the central figure of his religion, (and one of the central images of his poetry) Christ on the cross, and in so doing articulates his empathy[264] with him as a suffering human being: 'I have seen the figure/on our human tree, burned/into it by thought's lightning/and it writhed as I looked'[265]. Thomas posits the love which Christ embodied in his self-sacrifice as the 'answer' to the evil that his (and our) eyes see. He offers us a perspective, a perception, different ways of seeing that might lead to changed vision. He pleads that we listen: 'Let me tell you ...'[266] and what he tells us is that the news from the city is not good[267]. God endows him with vision, gives him communal sight, in order that he can see for us and that we can see ourselves through him[268]. In this way Thomas becomes our conscience as he critiques the modern world, the place where he sees us shifting our allegiance. He sees us making sacrifice to the god of quasars and pulsars, he sees us wiping our robotic hands clean on our disposable consciences[269]. He envisions our birth and rebirth as a tragic replaying of Christ present in 'ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/To the Father through the features of men's faces'[270], for Thomas has 'seen the child in the womb'[271] as a Christ forever being born 'biding its time/without the knowledge of

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[261] 'The Porch' *ibid*
[262] 'Fishing' *ibid*
[263] 'Petition' in Il'm (1972)
[264] cf Coleridge: 'One of the major interests of eighteenth-century English and Scottish criticism, especially after 1750: the concept of the 'sympathetic imagination' – the ability to enter imaginatively into what we contemplate, to identify with it, to acquire a shared realisation of its character and experience' Biographia Literaria (1983) Ch 15 p27n - the modern theory of *Einfühlung* (empathy) is one development of this concept, introduced in 1909 by Titchener.
[265] 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[266] 'Afon Rhiw' in Mass (1992)
[267] 'Present' in Frequencies (1978)
[268] 'Because it is not I who look/but I who am being looked through, Gloria' 'Gloria' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992) p12
[269] 'Make my voice ...' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[270] Hopkins: 'As kingfishers catch fire' Gardner (1967) No 57 p90
[271] 'The Un-born' in Mass (1992)

time', the child who is the model for a sculptor God forever fashioning man. Thomas has a vision of the young born fair, but the vision is a tragic one for he also sees the cancer that awaits them[272] and the innocence which will be taken away by life's process[273]. Thomas reiterates Hopkins' viewpoint which he expressed in 'The Bugler's First Communion', by turning away in regret at his vision of pain, sorrow, and the potential sin of life to come, and prays for his own child: 'Keep his feet free of the world's net'[274].

VII

Thomas utters out of both vocation and individuality, his envisioning self speaking from within community, his singular voice a representative mouthpiece for many. He speaks from different selves: as man, priest, poet, prophet, husband, father, son, and these compare with the multiple speaking 'voices' of Jeremiah. He knows moments of 'great calm' waiting for God to speak to him, and he pleads, 'prompt me, God', but not yet, for when he does speak, he knows that it is God who speaks through him; the meaning for Thomas is in the waiting[275] and is not in having but trying[276], for it is in these places of immediate endeavour that hope and faith are most alive. Thomas's individuality is mediated through his vocation, the latter being the true place of waiting, the silence of being not an empty experience, for the sun's light can speak and presence that seems empty can be full of 'that close throng/Of spirits waiting, as I'. Vocation is mediated through the man, it is articulated by him, by his unique way of 'going'. Thomas's journey, that is a nomadic, singular, pilgrimage towards the inner Wales of his imagination and the experience of an immanent God in the sunlight or the silence, testifies to the singular and detached nature of prophetic vocation – it is carried out among people, but it is carried out alone, the individual standing apart from what he surveys around him with knowing eyes. Thomas testifies to life itself being a singular journey, not only in his own life movement but in his poetry of orienteering and direction. He sees that all of our vocations are but manifestations of ourselves as individuals, yet the individual him/herself is also the *locus* of God where union is achieved between the divine and the human, between spirit and matter: 'God is ... the empty silence/Within, the place where we go/Seeking, not in hope to/Arrive or find'[277]. The meaning is in the seeking, in the journey itself and how we journey, not the destination. Thomas expresses this within the symbiotic relationship between an outward-facing vocation and an inward-peering individuality – the one not

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[272] 'Petition' in H'm (1972)
[273] 'The Un-born' in Mass (1992)
[274] 'Ap Huw's Testament' in Poetry (1958)
[275] 'Kneeling' from Flowers (1968)
[276] 'Afon Rhiw' from Mass (1992)
[277] 'Via Negativa' from H'm (1972)

being subsumed by the other, but rather enhanced and intensified. His poetry is the place where they meet.

VIII

Thomas's witness links the earthly with the heavenly to create an holistic vision of cosmos and universe, conflating microcosmic and macrocosmic imagery: 'I have worn my soul bare/On the world's roads, seeking what lay/Too close for the mind's lenses to see,/And come now with the first stars/Big on my lids'[278]. Thomas bears witness to what is ahistorical, to what has gone behind and will go before, a viewpoint which removes the quotidian and realigns vision towards the archetypal and eternal. Thomas counterpoints micro and macro likenesses in terms of relative size: 'the early and late cloud, beautiful and deadly/as the mushroom'[279]. He makes connections between the atomic bomb cloud and its microcosmic verisimilitude, the mushroom. He sees all things as being interconnected, the stars being likened to dew and the viruses outnumbering the star clusters[280]. Thomas compares and contrasts a universe that holds the infinitely large as well as the infinitely small, but all equally upheld by the inner active presence of God. The poem 'That was life's mischief ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint analyses our perception of what is above and what below, the names given for the infinity of stars we see contrasted with the 'packed/bud never to become a flower' which down here is just one among a myriad with no name. Thomas suggests we too mirror the stars in our own experiences of life: as are the stars, so we: they come into being, endure, then explode and die. Our lives are like this, as tiny reflections on earth of massive occurrences in the universe. Thomas perceives our lives as being 'measured' by the passage of the stars, which are indicative of the seasons but also of a far larger and far older timescale which although infinitely far also circumscribes our small and near lives: 'once more Orion/Unsheathed his sword from its dark scabbard;/And Sirius followed, loud as a bird/Whistling to eastward his bright notes./The stars are fixed, but the earth journeys/By strange migrations towards the cold/Frosts of autumn from the spring meadows'[281].

The largeness overhead – the infinity of space, one aspect of our empirical reality - is articulated alongside the infinitely small below and within, represented by Thomas's image

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[278] 'When I stand at night and look towards the stars, and think of the galaxies that stretch one after the other to oblivion ... I am ... someone who, partaking of contemporary knowledge, can still wonder at the Being that keeps it all in balance' Auto (1997) p145; cf 'Absolution' from Poetry (1958)
[279] 'Gloria' section from 'Mass for Hard Times' in Mass (1992)
[280] 'Gloria' section from 'Mass for Hard Times' in Mass (1992)
[281] The Minister (1953)

of the virus[282] as the tiny invader we can neither see with the naked eye, nor often control. Viruses are for Thomas something alarming that harms from within. The image is used as a motif for unseen danger, for the small being able to fell the large, for life comprising the seen and the unseen, and God over all. It could also be a motif for insidious evil, like a cancer that can eat away at the soul as a virus eats at the body. Thomas is positing his truth that nothing here is not created by God, that God is lord of the virus as well as the galaxy: that both are personnel of 'darkness' that do God's will[283]. God works in mysterious ways; the germ can find its way from the grass to the snail, to the liver and back to the grass again[284], molecular sub-structures providing a matrix of inter-connection that underpins organic matter. Yet Thomas is horror-stricken by such a vision of multiplicity. He prays that God might rid his intestine of the viruses that against (but perhaps really in accordance with) God's will are in occupation of his body[285]. This is acknowledgement of the Hebraic Yahweh who can judge and cause suffering in order to purify, as well as comfort and sustain – Blake's vision of a God who can create both the 'tyger' and the 'lamb'.

Witness itself can be deceptive. Wrong looking can mislead. Thomas's oft-used image of 'lenses' suggests to Ward that his seeing, his compulsive staring, his witness, must make us aware of new attitudes to the world, and especially technology[286]. Thomas's prophetic witness to the present engages with a 'progress' which he sees as misguided and damaging. He is unequivocal in his condemnation: 'We are misled/By perspective; the microscope/Is our sin'[287]. Looking through the wrong lenses, according to Thomas, ensures only wrong vision and a distorted view of truth. He believes we peer down and in, that we dissect in order to find smaller and smaller elements of life: fractyls, the ever-receding infinite which can only lead us to fragmentation and disunity. What we should be doing is cultivating an holistic vision which is encompassing and inclusive. Thomas proposes that we have trouble seeing the whole picture, if we only stare at a minute part. We are part of a whole that fits together, and by inventing division, we separate ourselves from life and from God[288]: 'You could take me to pieces/and there would be no angel hard/by, wringing its hands over/the demolition of its temple'[289]. Dissection reveals nothing except infinite

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[282] 'People, too, are prone to being tortured by bacteria so small as to be invisible' Auto (1997) p79
[283] 'Soliloquy' from H'm (1972)
[284] 'That' from Flowers (1968)
[285] 'Credo' from 'Mass for Hard Times' in Mass (1992)
[286] See Ward (2001) p59
[287] 'Earth' in H'm (1972)
[288] 'By looking into the depths of the sky, some people have been lucky enough to see the alpine swift ... We are guilty of not looking up often enough' Auto (1997) p140
[289] 'Bravo!' from Frequencies (1978)

pieces of disintegration, for when the scientist brings his lenses to bear, unity is fragmented[290].

Mystery, faith, imagination, can all in Thomas's opinion be countered and indeed cancelled out by the scientific light of the present that sterilises our thought and makes it too cold and clinical to approach religion in the old way. Our forward 'progress' and momentum robs us of valuable abilities: 'Now it is all clinical light/pouring into the interstices/where mystery could linger/questioning credentials of the divine/fossil, sterilising our thought/for its launching into its own outer space'[291]. It is not only looking inward which does damage by fragmenting perception, our 'outward' looking too is flawed. Our searchlights probe beyond the galaxies but we only shock ourselves with our ability to discover nothing[292]. Thomas exhorts by example: when he looks up at the night sky he lays astronomy aside. What he sees are spiritual conurbations illuminated (and activated) by the breath of God's love[293]. Astronomy, like other 'rational' sciences involves identifying, naming, analysing, cataloguing. In carrying out this exercise, mankind runs the risk of losing what the thing in itself is, how it 'selves'. Thomas favours the heart being used in perceiving, not relying wholly on rational empiricism. Were we to ask what is the 'meaning' of a galaxy, it is 'thought' which will go away thirsty, for the stars merely relay a cold message to the mind, giving agitation at the heart of what would otherwise be endless peace[294]. Thomas is implying that the spirit would not go away thirsty, were this to be used.

Vision, perspective, ways of seeing are what Thomas engages with. He witnesses to our modern ways whilst believing in the influence God might wield in our lives were we to allow it, and expounds where that influence might be found: 'God will never be plain and/out there, but dark rather and/inexplicable, as though he were in here'[295]. Thomas's vision perceives that God works within things, organically. He believes that we must reverse our lenses in order to reverse our values[296], for too often we have allowed them to lead us into a dark past that forever sees us repeat our first error: the thirst for knowledge that leads us from God[297]. We stare at Christ as from 'unfathomable' darkness towards unfathomable light[298] - we are as far from him now as we have ever been. Thomas takes

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[290] 'First Person' in Mass (1992)
[291] 'Approaches' from Experimenting (1986)
[292] 'Strands' *ibid*
[293] 'Sonata in X' from Mass (1992)
[294] 'Senior' from Between (1981)
[295] 'Pilgrimages' *ibid*
[296] "The imperatives ...' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[297] 'We must reverse ...' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[298] 'They set up ...' from 'Crucifixion' *ibid*

an eschatological stance in his prophetic warning to us to remember, as we go out into space, how dark it will grow on our way to the sun[299]. Here Thomas returns to ideas of direction and orienteering, cautioning that our direction should not be towards the light of a remote star, but towards the brightness over an interior horizon which is science transfigured in love's mirror[300]. Science cannot be lauded too much, for it is not of the heart, and we must distil all things within ourselves, the true crucible, the heart's 'love' being used to perceive the true meaning of life and the changes it brings. Thomas's witness of our 'progress' cautions that only the heart as compass can show us true north.

In 'Mediations'[301] Thomas discusses how God reaches us, proposing that there are different ways of perceiving reality and the residence of spirit. We have many 'ways' of looking: in science with its measurements and calibrations; in medicine with its microscopes that see the minute and invisible; in astronomy with its telescopes that see the large and visible; in religion with its worded liturgies and its visual metaphors. Thomas also proposes himself as a mediator of God through his words and his poems. Ultimately, his witness to our time with its loss of God rests for him upon our pursuit of knowledge and our idolising of technology. He insists that we must put our knowledge off and come to God with our mind bare, for he can be found in the simplest things. Thomas pursues the motifs of lens and windows on the world as media to sight, perception and understanding. He follows Jeremiah in this regard, beginning with one window and challenging that view, asking us to shift our position, through self-analysis and self-awareness, to a changed perception as we re-look at the world through a different window and see an altered vision. This is vision transfigured – enlightenment comes gradually, moving in parabola in tune with Thomas's thought *from* position A *to* position B. Thomas achieves this with Prytherch in his move from condemnation to acceptance of brotherhood. This differs from Hopkins, who begins (like Ezekiel) with an already transfigured vision, and he asks us to see the world and God through that lens. The latter becomes a point of departure, whilst the former is a journey. In this way, both Hopkins and Thomas are political and contextual in their critique of what is, their critical witness that analyses man and society. Both are fighting moral disintegration and a loss of spirit, but pursue amelioration of these perceived realities in different ways.

Thomas's attempts to witness to the 'placing' of God within world and universe, to the perspective of God within both microcosmic and macrocosmic reality, goes to the heart of

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[299] 'God's fool …' *ibid*
[300] 'Destinations' from Destinations (1985)
[301] from Laboratories (1975)

his sight, vision and revelation, as contained in his poetics. Thomas believes that the need for revelation at all suggests an ultimate reality beyond our attainment, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, and that this is where religion and poetry have common ground[302]. Existence itself depends upon human perception. Were we not here to see it, would it exist? Thomas answers that there must be a skull with spectacles on it, seeing what none see[303], because the world out there is our 'view from the window' and how we see it and what we see matters. Like a painting, life is set before us[304] and whether we find that painting ugly or beautiful depends on our eyes. Sunlight is a thing that needs a window before it can enter a dark room – windows don't happen, we have to make them happen[305]. The point is that Thomas believes we can make vision happen, depending upon what lens or window we use to view the world. Our perspective can be prejudiced, *a priori* and rigid, or it can be open, 'affective', and searching. All our visions, according to Thomas, should be in service of nullifying difference, enhancing empathy, and experiencing God.

Thomas as prophetic witness to ahistorical, eternal reality, and to the quotidian lens through which we perceive, seeks for an ultimate beauty that encompasses all things, but he knows the truth of life and how much that life undercuts unity[306]. Thomas's prophetic vision of the world is of its harsh realities, its ugliness, and his concern is for the world's moral and spiritual disintegration, but he has to believe that somewhere love and truth go on existing in order to fight the overlayering of evil: 'I must try to content/myself with the perception/that love and truth have/no wings, but are resident/like me here, practising/their sub-song quietly in the face/of the bitterest of winters'[307]. He sees the 'beautiful' being born from the 'demolition of the material'[308], thus beauty connotes spiritual beauty and the practising of honour and truth a spiritual state, for it is an absence of beauty that oppresses us[309], and in our modern world 'Beauty is ill/and has a drawn/face. The machine is everywhere'[310].

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[302] Wintle (1996) quoting Thomas, p307
[303] 'There must be' from Counterpoint (1990)
[304] 'The View from the Window' in Poetry (1958)
[305] 'Poetry for Supper' *ibid*
[306] 'Petition' from H'm (1972)
[307] 'Retirement' in Experimenting (1986)
[308] 'Minuet' from Later Poems (1983)
[309] 'Astronauts' from Young and Old (1972)
[310] 'Beauty is ill' from Counterpoint (1990)

IX

Thomas's prophetic task is to be a vocal disciple of and witness to Christ: 'He ... saw love in a dark crown/Of thorns blazing, and a winter tree/Golden with fruit of a man's body'[311]. In order to progress his vision of a world which comprises evil and suffering as well as spirit, truth and beauty, Thomas consistently uses the image of Christ and the suffering body. Christ is the cross which points both ways, highlighting the fact that we must make choices about journey and orientation within a geography that is essentially spiritual. Thomas sees the blessing of the cross as a warning of 'no through road'[312] and perceives Christ as a prototype of man's suffering just as he sees science as the evil of the myth's replacement[313]. For Thomas, Christ should be the beacon for our journey; his shadow should fall across our lives to remind us[314] he was, and is, to remind us of what he stands for. Thomas's task is to challenge us and change our directions which are our choices, for our own and the greater good.

Shepherd comments that for Christians, the 'Word' of God, the *Logos*, is the Christ. As a tree, self-expressing, does so by producing and reproducing itself, so God the Father, in speaking, re-produces himself by way of a signifier – God's Word, his own self-expression is his 'Son'. In this way, the Son reveals the nature of the Father, or 'speaks' the Father, his word made flesh (John 1:14)[315]. For Thomas likewise, the cross is the pointer, interjecting itself in our daily lives, pointing to road and journey, to crossroads and choice, and he returns to this image consistently: 'Of whom/does the scarecrow remind/arms wide as though pierced/by the rain's nails, while/the motorist goes by insolently'[316]. Christ is the 'imperishable scarecrow'[317] and Calvary is our signpost[318]. The cross speaks to the quotidian in other ways, spirit crossing matter as the image of pylons or 'gantries' on the skyline, metal trees 'with their arms out awkwardly/as love and money trying to be reconciled'[319]. Significantly, the gantries carry electrical current that signifies the crossroads where the operating principles of the world meet: love and money, matter and spirit, good and evil. As with Hopkins, Thomas perceives the energy currents of the world meeting in a closed circuit, with Christ as the connecting principle.

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[311] 'In a Country Church' from Song (1955)
[312] 'Benedictus' in 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)
[313] See Ward (2001) p173
[314] 'There must be' in Counterpoint (1990)
[315] See Shepherd (1996) p180
[316] 'Come Down' in Mass (1992)
[317] 'And even where there are trees, they don't change colour, but turn into scarecrows immediately after shedding their leaves in the first storm of autumn' Auto (1997) p160
[318] 'The Word' in Mass (1992)
[319] 'Were you one' in 'Incarnation' section of Counterpoint (1990)

The connection with Hopkins is striking: the electrical force of Yahweh within Hopkins' windhover correlates with Thomas's version where the nightjar rings in the fern like an electric bell whose battery has not run down for millions of years[320]. Both men conceive of God as the fiery force of energy enthusing the universe. Yahweh is the 'God of battles', the 'God of light/And fire'[321], is the life-force within all creatures: witness the kestrel in the sky 'burning' but not to tell[322]. The kestrel burns with being, with 'selving', not to tell in words, but to tell in actions by doing and being. This is further expressed by human 'selving' imaged by Yahweh's incarnation in Christ where God comes with all the 'unexpectedness' of a bolt of lightning, searing the cross[323]. The poem 'Covenant'[324] shows how much we are connected to such energy, Thomas seeing no end to our torment and the 'electricity' that convulses us is the same fire in which a god burns and is not consumed. The immanent current is certainly one of vital connection which provides us with both stability and balance[325].

The image of the cross which Thomas uses combines his perception of suffering and redemption, expressing the idea of God's suffering servant as exemplified by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Christ. Thomas is working from an Anglican and Lutheran tradition[326] which perceives and represents spirit by austere and pared-down means. Such Protestantism is represented by Thomas in The Minister: 'The evening sunlight on the wall/Of my room was a new temptation./Luther would have thrown his Bible at it'[327]. Morgan pulls up the flowers under his window and spreads cinders there instead – the action symbolic of a rejection of both the beautiful and the frivolous as being a dangerous distraction. Thomas himself seeks austerity and bareness within expression and experience of spirit, believing that we have 'over-furnished' our faith[328] and our language. Thomas's theology of the cross is therefore one of suffering and servitude, the cross as both a symbol and a sacrament of suffering and redemption which is not found in Hopkins' poetic vision. Hopkins' poetry is of a cosmic Christ or *Christus victor* – Christ in man is the real presence, the real sacrament, and Christ is present in the sacrament of the Mass, which is an act of alignment with his suffering, an *anamnesis* of life. Hopkins' poetry, among other things, is an expression of flushed aesthetic religiosity which counterpoints the pale

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[320] 'The Case' from No Truce (1995)
[321] See 'Earth' from H'm (1972)
[322] 'Sonata in X' from Mass (1992)
[323] 'Retired' in Mass (1992)
[324] from Between (1981)
[325] 'Revision' from Experimenting (1986)
[326] Based on the 39 Articles of Religion which define the Anglican faith. This 16th century document is deeply Lutheran with its theology of the cross and grace, Bible-based, designed to contradict the Romish faith that is founded on the concepts of purgatory, the invocation of Saints, and Transubstantiation etc.
[327] The Minister (1953)
[328] 'God's fool' from 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990); of his criticism of the 'idiom' of our churches that we devise to be more compatible with the furniture ('Bleak Liturgies' from Mass (1992))

gauntness of Thomas's Lutheran qualities. For both however, God's fiery energy both scorches and energises, for there is no meaning in life unless men are capable of rejecting love – God needs his martyrdom in order to exist[329]. Both poets perceive mankind as a suffering servant, the golden landscape of nature containing humans as twisted creatures 'crossing' it, each of us with our loads, our crosses to bear[330]. Thomas is arguing that if we want to truly know what love is, we must experience its opposite: in order to recognise the light, we need to know the darkness; in order to achieve salvation, we must first have fallen. Adam's *Felix Culpa* brings us redemption, and Christ would be meaningless without him. Thus the ideal of the cross needs Satan, and God's purposes (cf 'The Hand' in Laboratories (1975)) in creating creatures that cause chaos and suffering and that destroy, can only be fulfilled when we fight against these things because they are. This is Thomas' visionary way of redemption, his task as vocal disciple of and witness to Christ, to critique what it is that articulates us: the tree with its roots 'in the mind's dark' which was divinely planted and was the original fork in our existence. It is Thomas's prophetic task to articulate our minds' darkness, our failures, our narrowness of vision, in order that we may follow him in a journey of change and transformation towards the light. Thomas affirms that there is a morning, but there is also, correspondingly, a night that precedes it, and 'Time brings it nearer'. Thus the morning and the night are one: both 'Brittle with frost/And starlight'[331]. The Calvary that is our signpost, 'arms/pointing in opposite directions', brings us in the end to the same place, 'so impossible/is it to escape love'[332].

X

In order to express his prophetic critique and vision, his task and vocation, Thomas uses the medium of his art: words. His language is wrought and rhetorical for he is engaged in a didactic act, his prophetic muse compelling our attention, persuading us, his own imperative to speak enclosed within a poetics that is at once spare yet forceful. Dyson comments that Thomas's lucidity is 'clearly the product of highly wrought art'[333], and Bedient joins him in assessing Thomas' work as being 'Not strongly accentual, relying on the delicate water-surface tension of phrase as much as on metre, rhymeless, infrequently end-stopped, and usually in lines of fewer than nine syllables, Thomas's poetry is like a briskly descending brook'[334]. In line with the prophets, and Hopkins, Thomas's concern is to jolt us out of complacency, to 'shake and unset our morticed metaphors', to provide us

[329] 'Amen' from Laboratories (1975)
[330] 'The Observer' from Flowers (1968)
[331] 'Christmas' from Flowers (1968)
[332] 'The Word' in Mass (1992)
[333] Dyson (1981) p297
[334] Bedient (1974) p54

with verbal dexterity that will claim our attention and enable us to follow him with new eyes in his journey towards transfiguration.

Thomas attempts to affect us with his choice of language. He deliberately uses Welsh, aimed at an English-speaking readership, in order to disorientate and discomfit and force our awareness of cultural, historical, geographical difference. Thus he uses Welsh words: 'awdl' and 'cywydd'; also Welsh names: 'Gruffudd Llwyd'[335], 'Ysbaddaden Penkawr'[336]; and Welsh places: 'Maes-yr-Onnen' and 'Traeth Maelgwn', locating his poetry within a Welshness that fosters and reclaims Welsh identity and history, redeeming the time. The use of Welsh is both defence and attack aimed at the English, at whose hands Thomas believes, Welsh culture has been eroded.

Other obvious vocabularies link with specific things like the soil, agriculture, the history of the land, or spirituality, and there is a fair selection of these, for example: 'fescue', 'Scatheless', 'the tup', 'wether', 'ousel', 'sphagnum', 'Tares', 'cowries', 'macaronics', 'comestibles', 'withies', 'pthisis' and 'ichor'. Bedient believes that Thomas's use of language is taut, that it is 'form following function'[337]. This function is nothing less than to cajole, persuade, berate, anything which will make us think anew, jolt us out of complacency of opinion, vision, habit. Thomas's words are the 'naked daylight' which enables us all to see more clearly[338]. Thomas can however be more pedantic when he wishes: 'pusillanimous'[339] being one example, and he also updates his language especially as it equates to human progress, *viz*: 'becquerels and decibels', and 'leptons and quarks'[340]. Thomas can also be conversational/colloquial: 'Miserable? Kick my arse!'[341]. Thus there is dexterity in his lexical choices; he is fleet of foot and can change register easily as the requirements of his articulation demands.

In these senses, Thomas's poetry is both modern and ancient, echoing the prophets' wide-ranging use of different modes of discourse which meant that they utilised the whole of their society's language, as best fitted their intent[342]. Thomas is also oral and preacherly in terms of content with his emphasis on spoken sound by way of shifting patterns of vocabulary and voice techniques such as alliteration, assonance, dissonance, para-rhyme etc. There is little regular repetition in terms of end-rhyme or metre, and this contributes to

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[335] 'The Tree' from Land (1952)
[336] 'Border Blues' in Poetry (1958)
[337] Bedient (1974) p54
[338] Bedient (1974) p54
[339] 'A Life' in Experimenting (1986)
[340] See Mass (1992)
[341] 'Lore' from Tares (1961)
[342] See Chapter 2 p55ff

rapid shifts of direction, breathing, attention, which is the opposite of laboriously crafted and regular verse. This gives Thomas's poetry a lightness of touch in terms of its running lines that are cut to produce a deliberate intellectual quality which reflect his character and his subject-matter. Hopkins, particularly in later poems such as 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' and 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' produces a similar running lightness of touch but undercuts this modernity by way of his deliberate and heavy-handed succession of alliterating and vowelling words, and underlying regularity of beat which ensure his poetry is crammed, forceful, and more 'writerly' or literary.

With respect to form, Thomas can also be dextrous. In 'Iago Prytherch'[343] he chooses a rhyme scheme, aa bb cdee dcee, providing an harmonious scaffolding that complements and enhances the subject matter which relates to the regular wheeling of the seasons and man's place within that. Here he provides, through a synthesis of form and content, an holistic vision that circumscribes wholeness and symmetry in spite of time and change. He again uses rhyme in 'The Ancients of the World'[344] as if to present an enduring harmony within nature itself[345]. Through form Thomas seeks to highlight the ongoing nature of life, perceiving harmony and regularity underlying all that we experience in spite of chaos, pain, decay, death. His answer to human experience is that the winter of nature, the worst time, is followed by spring, a time of renewal, resurgence and energy, and he tries to highlight through the tight rhyme, the fact that humanity too is part of this death and rebirth, that our seasons are like nature's seasons. Form and rhyme equate to the diachronic continuity underlying current synchronic life.

In contrast to this aspect of his work where he seeks through form to express 'eternal' states, Thomas uses other techniques to emphasise the fragmentary quality of the quotidian, sudden changes that occur in life without warning, and the perception of disintegration within modernity. End-stopped and abrupt lines bring one up short and emphasise the word at line-end, and deliberately work to undermine the fluidity of the verse which then becomes choppy and inconstant. Line-endings are important for Thomas, he uses them for emphasis. See 'Henry James'[346] where a sequence like 'the significance', 'the deprecation', 'the failure', work to highlight these within the context of the overall articulation and give them greater weight. Emphasis and stress are what he attends to most but he achieves these through positioning, whereas Hopkins achieves them through rhythm. This works not only at line endings, but at line beginnings, where the

[343] from Stones (1946)
[344] from Land (1952)
[345] cf 'Song at the Year's Turning' from Song (1955)
[346] from Frequencies (1978)

enjambement is used to bear emphasis on the heavy step one begins with. See for example 'This To Do'[347] where 'Of air', 'Of water', 'Darkness', 'Conger', 'Phosphorous', 'Swag', 'Purse' and 'Paying' shadow the sense of the argument and make us treat them differently within that context: they become the most important words and summarise the progression of visual imagery[348]. Thomas uses such emphasis to progress his argument, to enhance the visual, and to ensure that internal echoes within his poems enable coherence and provide, like gold thread in a tapestry, highlights which catch the eye and ensure both attention and interest. In this way through style and form, Thomas's poems never become either boring or too similar and thereby fail to fulfil the 'jolting' function for which they were made.

Another technique which maintains liveliness within his poetry is repetition (see 'This is the land' and 'Of God' repetition in The Minister) which is used to hammer home a point. Thomas also uses alliteration (see 'excess', 'bottomless' and 'glass' in 'This One'[349]) to add sophisticated sound effects; and often tends to split his lines in a schismatic way in order to disrupt the flow. This splitting of syntax also has the effect of emphasising individual words. See for example: 'as subtle/As water, with your mineral/Poetry and promises/Of obedience'[350] which weights the words by displacing them, each line by itself making no sense but the enjambement linking and separating simultaneously. This is done to striking effect in 'His Condescensions Are Short-Lived'[351] where a list is split into two halves, both separated and joined, each distinct part of the syntax distorted yet emphasised:

> All those tanks
> and guns; the processions
> that go nowhere; the medals
> and gold braid; the government's
> yearly awards; the replenishment
> of the clapped ranks of
> the peerage.

Thomas also fractures actual words at his line-ends (as did Hopkins), to highlight the word being damaged, to make us halt for a moment and ponder: 'what does the mem-/ory number' also 'without per-/spective'[352]. Significantly, these are two important words for Thomas, and he chooses here to emphasise them by breaking them, perhaps to show that memory itself is a broken and distorted thing, as is perspective. Thomas also chooses to contort sense itself, poetry imitating the apparent lack of order in life: 'I look/at not with

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[347] from Pietà (1966)
[348] cf also 'Reservoirs' from Flowers (1968); and 'The Fair' from H'm (1972)
[349] from Experimenting (1986)
[350] 'Soliloquy' from H'm (1972)
[351] from What is a Welshman? (1974)
[352] See 'Careers' from Flowers (1968)

them'[353], also 'neither/Did they ask not'[354]. Sometimes his syntax runs on with no punctuation so that it becomes one long breathless sentence with no beginning and no end, beginning *in medias res*[355]:

> and one said
> speak to us of love
> and the preacher opened
> his mouth and the word God
> fell out so they tried
> again speak to us
> of God then but the preacher
> was silent reaching ...

Shepherd identifies such a style as a 'stream of consciousness' mode developing by association[356], saying of Thomas's running syntax[357] that the tone is meditative, beginning *in medias res* and creating the impression that the reader is eavesdropping on the thoughts of the speaker, a notion emphasised by the absence of syntax[358].

Such rhetorical techniques comprise a 'poetics of persuasion', making of his craft an exciting and rewarding experience for the reader. Within this unsettled setting Thomas provides a didactic vision of the world. He words his journey through strength (a forceful economy) and suppleness (dexterity and virtuosity of performance) towards altered vision and perception. Thomas avoids tradition deliberately, to maintain his prophetic balance of challenge and change: he distributes his weight unevenly and without the traditional supports of English verse. The iambic metre, the stanza and full rhyme are 'sparingly deployed' and in their place are 'lesser structural elements' such as internal rhyme, delayed rhyme, para-rhyme, assonance and enjambement[359]. All of these are utilised in order to shock, engage, but ultimately persuade.

XI

Thomas has a call to utterance, a commissioning to poetics, and his large body of work effectively expresses this. Ward argues for the existence of an overall vocational unity within Thomas's *corpus* that is very convincing. He perceives the sense of a voice that is larger than life, and he believes that 'something is being said or sung for a lifetime' and is being done with both authority and power achieved over decades by way of a 'germane

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[353] 'Carcers' *ibid*
[354] 'There' in Pietà (1966)
[355] See 'H'm from H'm (1972); also 'Harbour' from Young and Old (1972)
[356] See Shepherd (1996) p179
[357] cf 'The Way' in AD section of Counterpoint (1990); cf also 'I woke up' from BC section of Counterpoint (1990)
[358] See Shepherd (1996) p179
[359] See Wintle (1996) p389

calling' that comprises application, observation, controlled feeling, changes of life-situation, political belief, a sense of nature, and a sense of people[360]. Thomas's 'calling' and 'commissioning' to poetry and the priesthood is revealed by way of a prophetic 'resolving vision' which both critiques and condemns the present in an effort to provide cultivable remedies towards adjustment and transformation.

As priest Thomas's calling was community-based, mainly rural, where he progressed his ministry and mission by tending the sick[361], dealing with the rites and grief of death[362], taking services and administering communion where he broke 'the live bread' for the 'starved folk'[363], preaching[364], and visiting his parishioners[365]. He comments on this calling by saying that he ministered 'uneasily' to them, perceiving the emptiness of a nation through the gaps in the straggling hedgerows[366]. A prophetic call to mission and ministry, to condemnation and exhortation, takes place within active endeavour, but some critics challenge this view of Thomas as prophet: 'Among some he is regarded as a prophet – though this ... is an ambivalent soubriquet'[367]. Thomas believed that he himself was a kind of 'Doctor in verse' carrying out a mission that was 'scarce' now; however, he was aware that most poets 'are their own patients', compelled to treat their own complaints first of all, which remain 'peculiar always'[368]. 'Doctors in verse' is an appellation that could fit the ancient Prophets themselves, whose complaints personal and societal, were peculiar by virtue of the fact that they worked from the margins of society and held peculiarly authoritative yet officially unacknowledged and unsanctioned positions. Thomas's poem goes on to assert that the areas of the 'infirm body' of our 'sick' culture do depend solely upon a poet's cure, because that cure is of the soul, heart and mind, not of the body. It is the poet who speaks to things that cannot be touched or manipulated by 'rough hands' as a physical body can, but speaks rather to the acts of the hands for their own sake. In 'The Times' from Frequencies (1978) Thomas hears beyond a background of guns and bombs 'one voice' that is quieter than the rest. This is the prophetic voice commissioned to speak out against what is happening, but amid the clamour of life can only be heard by those who are willing to listen[369].

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[360] See Ward (2001) p195-6
[361] In Chirk, his first parish where he served as Curate, 'It was here, for the first time, that he came face to face with the problem of pain. Some of the parishioners were very ill and required frequent visiting' Auto (1997) p43
[362] See 'Funeral' from Bread (1963)
[363] 'Bread' from Poetry (1958)
[364] 'From the point of view of politics, patriotism was one of his favourite topics. He would see a need for reminding the Welsh-speaking congregations who they were and encouraging them to be proud of their nationality, remembering the labour of the valiant Welsh in the past to pass the language on to them' Auto (1997) p92
[365] 'Ninetieth Birthday' from Tares (1961)
[366] 'Drowning' in Welsh Airs (1987)
[367] See Wintle (1996) Preface pxiv
[368] 'The Cure' in Poetry (1958)
[369] 'Each nation needs its prophets, but it is a bad thing to wash dirty clothes in public' Auto (1997) p104

With respect to prophetic commissioning, this ensures that the prophet 'wears the sober armour/Of God, and wields the fiery tongue/Of God, and listens to the voice/Of God, the voice no others listen to'[370]. Commissioning by God denotes a relationship with God whereby the prophet can complain at him for the task given. Thomas articulates a kind of Jeremiac plaint in this regard: 'Woe is me that I was born! Who is wounded, and I am not wounded? For I bear in my body the marks of this battle'[371]. Call and commissioning is effectively a call to battle: a battle with God, a battle with the self, a battle with the people whom the prophet represents before God and to whom he takes God's representations. The prophet's battle is also one with and against 'the times'. Ward comments that Thomas's writing is born out of the meeting of an 'intense physical apprehension' with an 'equally intense spiritual struggle'[372]. Dyson also perceives that within Thomas's work exist contraries which struggle against one another. Thomas can be 'Welsh, or laconic, or lacerating, or ironically detached, or bitterly compassionate, or rarely empathetic, or universally human', for all of these apparent contraries meet in him and in his poetics[373]. A late photograph of Thomas (by Howard Barlow)[374] portrays Thomas's severe face, his gimlet eyes and unruly hair, looking like a true prophet who is called to be zealous and passionate in condemnation of his contemporaries[375].

Called to be the people's representative before God, Thomas testifies that he watches and prays for them, and so increases his own small store of credit in the bank of God[376]. He is aware however that in life the prophetic voice is small amid the uproar, and no-one is listening – the wise man is always shouting inaudibly across the abyss[377]. Thomas's understanding of lack of audience, lack of prominence for his message within his times allies itself with the understanding of the ancient prophets who knew their voices were not being heard, yet were instructed by God to go on speaking anyway. Thomas's call takes place within a lineage of call, the synchronic face of prophecy changing whilst the background of diachronic continuity continues. The currently commissioned mouth articulates for the present, ancient pervasive and ongoing ethical ideals. From the 'heart of the wood' somebody always huddles, and a voice comes, whether it be from Buddha,

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[370] The Minister (1953)
[371] Auto (1997) p22
[372] See Ward (2001) p155
[373] Dyson (1981) p286
[374] This appears facing p268 of Wintle's Furious Interiors, London (1996).
[375] 'The sources of such rancour are not hard to locate ... There is the frustrated patriotism, the feeling that to be Welsh is to be pulverized, that one's territory has been irredeemably taken over; there is the man's obvious unsociability, given vent here as unbridled misanthropy; but as well as these there is a religious intractability, Thomas as Isaiah or Jeremiah reborn' Wintle (1996) p290
[376] 'Priest and Peasant' from Song (1955)
[377] 'Eheu! Fugaces' from The Way of It (1977)

Plato, Blake or Jung -- the name only changes but identity remains that is 'pure being', waiting to be come at by us, were we only to pay heed[378]. Thomas asks how many times over must he begin again, and the prophetic answer must be that the prophet must always 'begin again' for in each new age an old ill must be highlighted and challenged. The prophet must always be 'with the future' but also warning of it, he must go on prophesying ultimate destruction if ways are not rectified[379]. Thomas perceives an endless call to prophetic action, he is forever 'a migrant/between nominatives', moving between 'I' and 'I' in endless metamorphosis. He is a representative principle who is always a new singer of an old song, an innovator regardless of time[380]. Coming back in his right season like the swallows, the prophet will always 'see us next year'.

Within call to vocation, lies fulfilling of prophetic function. The prophet's eyes glow with a 'deep, inner pthisic zeal' as he embodies the lamp which lights and counters darkness, the fire that kindles in its turn and warms. Thomas is commissioned to be these things on behalf of the 'hearts of the hill folk'[381]. He is a fiery presence, hot sparks falling on dry thoughts from his lips in the pulpit, until the whole chapel is ablaze. He is a hero, searching for the golden fleece, for his shirt of fire[382]. His commissioning, his 'seeing of the light' ensures that his eyes become blind and his lips are sealed like Job's[383]. Like Isaiah, revelation renders him blind and dumb in order that he might see and speak the word of God. Whatever we can imagine, has already happened, for the past is in the future and the future in the past. Isaiah's angel still flies 'hither and thither' with his hot coal, touching the lips of the contemporary prophet and cleansing him in order that he can speak[384].

Thomas's call to vocation as poet, is placed within the context of lineage from other poets of the past, viz Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley, Yeats. Thomas uses these as ancestors, or *auctors,* and in their wake can say 'I stand now, tolling my name/in the poem's empty church, summoning to the celebration'[385]. Thomas sees the poem as a vessel for spirit, a sacred space, and reading the poem is a summons to us to take part in the celebration or the sacrament of life. Thomas follows Wallace Stevens in this regard, who in place of the 'empty church' sees a 'void world', and on behalf of both himself and Stevens as poets navigating a difficult world, Thomas believes that in the absence of imagination, there is

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[378] 'The Wood' from Experimenting (1986)
[379] 'Symbols' from No Truce (1995)
[380] 'Swallows' from No Truce (1995)
[381] The Minister (1953)
[382] 'Somewhere' from Laboratories (1975)
[383] 'Priest and Peasant' from Song (1955)
[384] 'Thus' from Laboratories (1975)
[385] 'Passage' from Later Poems (1983)

no hope[386]. This proposes that the imagination can provide us with hope, for the imagination encompasses vision, ways of seeing, and can be transfigurative, and it is to hypothetical but possible truths and ideals that the imagination speaks. For Stevens, his poetry was his church, and Thomas places himself in juxtaposition to this point of view, standing at a different altar yet at the same time an altar which they both share. Thomas too celebrates the sacrament of the imagination, whose 'high-priest' he believes Stevens to be. This makes of poets the 'high-priests' of a poetic religion which holds metaphors, syntax, grammar, and imagination, to be sacred, and the administration of this religion carried out by poets who are directly inspired: 'Insured against/everything but the muse'. Neither poet has 'official' standing as priest, but as prophets both perform functions of celebration, sanctification, and indeed obeisance to the sacrality of language itself, the place where vision, spirituality, imagination, inspiration, come together and are celebrated.

As the prophets before him, Thomas is dumb[387], yet he claims 'a certain amount of poetic licence, freedom to follow the vision of poetry, the imaginative vision of poetry' and he asserts that poetry is religion, religion is poetry. Thomas believed that the message of the New Testament was poetry, that Christ was a poet[388], that the New Testament is a metaphor, the Resurrection a metaphor, and he felt within his rights to approach his whole vocation as priest and preacher as one who was to present poetry, and he believed that when he was preaching poetry, he was preaching Christianity[389]. Thomas believes in the truth of the imagination[390] but he goes further than this, asserting that poets are prophets or watchmen, guarding our way, describing them as 'shining sentinels'[391]. The poets may die, but their words live on to give instruction, imaginative transformative vision, aid – the witnesses themselves may die but they commend their metaphors to our notice[392]. The poet's hand, writing, becomes a spiritual tool[393] that is the poet's 'timeless instrument' which calls us back from our immersion within the quotidian, and turns our attention to the numinous and the eternal[394].

These calls to vocation as priest, prophet, poet, are distilled within the crucible of Thomas as man. He aligns himself with Amos (who was no prophet but merely a herdsman and a

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[386] 'Homage to Wallace Stevens' from No Truce (1995)
[387] 'Barn Owl' in 'Bestiary' from No Truce (1995)
[388] 'People liked to ask him whether there was any tension between his two offices as priest and poet, and he would deny this through insisting on seeing Jesus as a poet' Auto (1997) p84
[389] Quoted by Anthony Conran in his article: 'R S Thomas as a mystical poet' in Poetry Wales (Spring 1979) p11
[390] *ibid* p20
[391] 'On an evening like this' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[392] 'Bleak Liturgies' from Mass (1992)
[393] Dyson (1981) argues that the 'teaching of Christ himself, and also ... of the later Old Testament prophets ... rests on a mixture of witness, enigma and vivid personal experience which ... is closely akin to the explorations of our finest modern writers' Introduction pxvi-ii
[394] 'First Person' from Mass (1992)

dresser of fig trees) when he says: 'a pastor/Is a man first and a minister after'[395], his pastoral care located within his essential humanity. Even within his vision of himself as prophet, he asks and answers: 'Am I the keeper/Of the heart's relics, blowing the dust/In my own eyes? I am a man'[396]. However, this view of himself as keeper which he denies is of course exactly the role he carries out, for the prophet is indeed a 'keeper' of the 'heart's relics' at the expense of himself. He may be such a keeper but he is also a man, his appointment as prophet mediated through his experience of being human. His call to vocation as priest/prophet/poet/man becomes, then, the crucible for a prophetic 'resolving vision'[397] which is dynamic, positive and hopeful, for 'the readings of the zeitgeist/are never at zero'[398]. In other words, hope can never fail, for life itself is where vision can become reality. Life is the *locus* for transformation, transfiguration, metamorphosis, and we have the power to make the change. Thus Thomas can exhort us here and now: 'Let the deaf men/be helped; in the silence that has come/upon them, let some influence/work so those closed porches/be opened once more. Let the bomb/swerve. Let the raised knife of the murderer/be somehow deflected. There are no/laws there other than the limits of/our understanding ... we must ask rather/for the transformation of the will/to evil, for more loving/mutations, for the better ventilating/of the atmosphere of the closed mind'[399]. This is a poetic prayer articulated by way of prophetic vision: the 'what should be' emanating directly from Thomas's experience of humankind as it really is. His resolving vision is a prophetic endeavour – let men change their actions through analysis, understanding, choice, willed deed, all of which comprise a resolving vision worked at from within, not engineered by some *Deus ex machina* from without.

We must therefore mediate spirit within materiality, find the religious sense in the 'ordinary things of life'[400]. These ordinary things involve perception and behaviour, and Thomas views life as something which must be deliberately crafted: 'as form in sculpture is the prisoner/of the hard rock, so in everyday life/it is the plain facts and natural happenings/that conceal God and reveal him to us/little by little under the mind's tooling'[401]. This view echoes Hopkins' perspective[402], and both believe that the hand is the most important tool of 'doing', for without it, our world would be meaningless because we

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[395] The Minister (1953)
[396] 'A Welsh Testament' from Tares (1961)
[397] See Bedient (1974) Introduction px
[398] 'Anybody's Alphabet' from No Truce (1995)
[399] 'Adjustments' in Frequencies (1978)
[400] See Phillips (1986) p125
[401] 'Emerging' in Frequencies (1978)
[402] Hopkins claims that a life should be a mastered thing, that it should be deliberately crafted, not left alone to grow rank and heedless: 'Boughs being pruned, birds preened, show more fair;/To grace them spires are shaped with corner squinches;/Enriched posts are chamfer'd; everywhere/He heightens worth who guardedly diminishes;/Diamonds are better cut; who pare, repair;/Is statuary rated by its inches?' Gardner (1967) No 96 p132 'Seven Epigrams' epigram vii

refuse to engage with it. The world is 'without meaning' as it awaits our coming, the coming of the hand which creates and destroys. Our hand becomes an echo of God's hand, who created first, and created a hand that can in turn create on its own. God lets the hand go in order that it can testify to its creator's existence – it becomes a 'messenger' of the 'mixed things' it makes, but still it tells us that God is[403]. Thomas articulates to us the deeds of our own hands, how we affect ourselves, others, the wider life of our society, for we all exist within an inter-connecting matrix of interrelations and inter-effects. Within his personal calling to speak for and to Wales in particular, Thomas as prophet, priest, poet and man, knows the contemporary problems that are peculiar to this small nation in its period of crisis. He believes that it is amongst those who are most intelligent and most aware of what is happening that creative writers are to be found, and that above all it is they who are in tune with the true need of that nation[404].

Much of Thomas's prophetic wrath is pointed at the Welsh in much the same way the ancient prophets' wrath was aimed at Israel: 'Nowhere else in English poetry do we find poem after poem directed, in love and anger, at an entire people ... Thomas is to Wales a kind of Good Samaritan, Mary Magdalen, and fearful Jahweh in one. Turning to his next poem we scarcely know whether to expect a poet blessing or scorning, or steeped in an acid of despair'[405]. Thomas's calling to condemn and exhort comprises his eyes, which can only witness the defeat of virtue[406], yet at the same time he is a realist who exits his idealistic dream to come face-to-face with what is[407]. He is unequivocal in his condemnation of the present, of what we are and what we do: we lack integrity and the stench of our deeds is an offence to God[408]; our towns are 'malignant' and our consciences can be bought and sold[409]; our lives are the 'arid sluices' where cash pours and our hearts are 'dessicated'[410]; our 'flesh' undermines us and causes our downfall[411]; we suffer from 'the usury/of the spirit'[412]; we worship the false gods of science, technology and progress which merely set up new idols for us[413]; we experiment with life itself, do not hold it holy[414]; we do not keep our vows[415]; we are neither clever nor honest and are full of pride

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[403] These quotes from 'The Hand' in Laboratories (1975)
[404] Auto (1997) p22
[405] Bedient (1974) p60
[406] 'Petition' in H'm (1972)
[407] 'It is easier to be good while on your knees than in the middle of all the temptations and hubbub of the world of society. It is a poor religion that believes that it is only in the places set at a remove that god is to be found' Auto (1997) p105; cf 'Via Crucis' in Residues (2002): 'It is a perpetual/coming-to from the dream's/anaesthetic to be brought/face to face with reality's/mural'
[408] 'Incense' from The Way of It (1977)
[409] 'Fair Day' from Between (1981)
[410] 'Rich' from Residues (2002)
[411] 'Captain Cook's Last Voyage' from Ingrowing Thoughts (1985)
[412] 'I woke up' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[413] 'Make my voice' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[414] 'Plas-yn-Rhiw' from Mass (1992)

and disbelief[416]; we are hypocritical, and kill, with a Bible under one arm and a bomb under the other[417]; we are fascinated by evil[418]; and worst of all science has replaced faith[419]. Thomas feels compelled to utter warning and denunciation within a called poetics that echoes the utterances of the ancient prophets.

Thomas sees his calling to poetry as a crucial factor for change in this context, for poetry is that which arrives at the intellect by way of the heart[420]. Poetry also sings in celebration of the heart and the 'holiness of its affections'[421]. Poetry is also a spell that is woven by sound in the absence of logic[422]. If we cannot choose whether or not we suffer, what we can choose is our response to that suffering[423]. Thomas proposes within a transformative poetics, that the kindgom of God is indeed at hand, for it is by our hands' deeds that we embrace or deny it. Thomas's prophetic call to utter takes place within an ahistoricism that touches the quotidian yet over-arches eternity: 'I am a seeker/in time for that which is/beyond time, that is everywhere/and nowhere; no more before/than after, yet always/about to be'[424]. This means the kingdom of God is about to be, it is literally 'at hand', always just receding yet always here. Thomas, as its mouthpiece, as God's channel to man, is a seeker and expresser of the ideal, who reaches for the diachronic perfection that underlies synchronic imperfection. He hopes to 'to look at people and things in a way which includes the light and the dark. It is to see them with the whole of existence as their background; to see them *sub specie aeternitatis*'[425].

Thomas wants us as readers to journey together with him, in a certain direction, for he has always felt within his own life context that there were 'unseen forces' which acted upon him 'or made their adjustments' according to their own plan. His call and commissioning to an articulated vision emphasises our right to choose. He believes in a 'larger pattern' and wants us to take responsibility for ourselves so that together we may all travel 'a little nearer the accomplishment/of the design'[426]. Thomas understands the nature of compulsion: 'It was not/I who lived, but life rather/that lived me', and what underpins both his belief in the 'larger pattern' as well as our own responsibility within it which contributes to that overall design, is his belief in the living reality of God. Thomas witnesses to the

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[415] 'Beauty is ill' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[416] 'Kyrie' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)
[417] 'Winged God' from No Truce (1995)
[418] 'Incubation' from No Truce (1995)
[419] 'Space Walking' from Residues (2002)
[420] 'Don't ask me' from Residues (2002)
[421] 'Sanctus' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)
[422] 'Don't ask me' from Residues (2002)
[423] 'The Unvanquished' from Destinations (1985)
[424] 'Abercuawg' from Frequencies (1978)
[425] Phillips (1986) p129
[426] 'In Context' from Frequencies (1978)

fact that for him: 'There is an unseen/power ... Patiently with invisible structures/he builds, and as patiently/we must pray, surrendering the ordering/of the ingredients to a wisdom that/is beyond our own'[427].

XII

Thomas's vocation as priest and prophet incorporates the realisation of failure and ineffectuality in mission. This is part of the prophetic process and of Thomas's theology of the cross – the realisation that the road to salvation leads through the cross. Failure in vocation brings the prophet down from the heights of communion with God to the plodding fruitlessness of the everyday. He visits people who distort his faith and vision as he goes up the 'green lane' only to come slowly down 'in the dark' feeling the cross he believes in 'warp in his hands'[428]. Thomas, Hopkins and Blake as characters evince different aspects of the prophetic experience. Hopkins is anguished, private, dialogic in his painful communion with God; Thomas is resolute in his plodding but nihilistic. Blake is inflamed, transfigured, a visionary who perceives giant archetypal forces manipulating eternity. Like Hopkins, Thomas compares 'brute' nature which naturally and joyfully 'selves', producing buds from the soil that evince a power wielded 'without sin'[429], with the 'moral' nature of man which must be cultivated - the former portrayed as being innocent and sinless, as against man who is deliberately and waywardly sinful. Blake represents these as necessary but contrary states of innocence and experience, essential to the progression of life.

Thomas, like Hopkins (compare 'Felix Randal') is deeply affected by the people he tends: 'the dark/Silting the veins of that sick man/I left stranded upon the vast/And lonely shore of his bleak bed'[430] leaves him 'appalled'. He is also unequivocal and realistic about his status within his parish, and well knows the people's attitude towards him, feeling himself to be chosen by them in the same way that they choose their horses: for sheer hard work[431]. The privations which Thomas endured were similar to Hopkins' experience of mission. Thomas comments of a predecessor: 'the last one died/Sooner than they expected ... just the natural/Breaking of the heart beneath a load/Unfit for horses'. Hopkins too noted the premature deaths of brothers due to overwork and hardship[432]. One parishioner of

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[427] 'Adjustments' from Frequencies (1978)
[428] 'The Priest' in Flowers (1968)
[429] 'The Garden' in Bread (1963)
[430] 'Evans' from Poetry (1958)
[431] The Minister (1953)
[432] Hopkins comments in a letter to his mother: XCIII New Year's Day 1882 from Manresa House, Roehampton: 'I am hourly expecting orders to return to Liverpool. One of our Fathers, who was for the best part of two years my yokemate

Thomas's had nine years in his sickbed where Thomas read him psalms, said prayers and was still[433]. Thomas watched the past's 'slow stream' flowing through his charge's head, which kept the 'rusty mill of the mind' turning, but it was Thomas the mill ground. Again we are reminded of Felix Randal, of strength, size and energy being cut down by age, 'The great frame rotted' and all the priest can do is sit by and watch helplessly.

A keen feeling of failure also inheres in Thomas's relationship with Yahweh, which echoes the weary wrestling experience of Hopkins and the ancient prophets: 'I would have knelt/long, wrestling with you, wearing/you down. Hear my prayer, Lord, hear/my prayer'[434]. Thomas wrestles with God[435], pleads with God, has dialogues with God[436], and also becomes angry with God as Job does, for both his experience of being prophetic and his experience of humanity, feeling his heart 'abused'[437]. Thomas's understanding echoes that of the prophets in his sense of failure in mission and ministry[438]: all that he does is in vain in spite of his compelling faith and his didactic imperatives to us. He feels that he fails in prayer[439], and in spite of his efforts, like Hopkins, he experiences only aridity and darkness: 'Deliver me from the long drought/of the mind'. Characteristically, however, Thomas returns to positivity in the face of both failure and drought, countering such negative experiences with a balancing affirmation. He may, like the tide, run up the approaches of God and fall back, but he hopes that prayer can have its springs too, 'brimming, disarming him' and discovering somewhere 'among his fissures deposits of mercy/where trust may root and grow'[440].

Thomas, as well as feeling a sense of ineffectuality in mission and ministry, and failure in his relationship with God, also engages with his perception of the inadequacy of language to fully articulate Deity: 'For the failure of language/there is no redress'[441]. Even poetry fails at God's frontier. Thomas sees language and the use of language to articulate God as another kind of 'wrestling' with infinity or the unknown, but feels God's challenge to him

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on that laborious mission, died there yesterday night after a short sickness, in harness and in his prime' Abbott (1956) p162; cf letter LV to his mother Oct 20,1869 from Roehampton: 'We have changed our Rector: Fr Fitzsimon's health was broken with hard work ...' Abbott (1956) p108.

[433] 'The Mill' from Bread (1963)

[434] 'Emerging' from Laboratories (1975)

[435] cf also 'The Combat' from Laboratories (1975)

[436] 'Anybody's Alphabet' from No Truce (1995)

[437] 'At It' from Frequencies (1978)

[438] 'Thomas speaks of his own feeling of failure: 'I really found that it was just more or less no good. One goes visiting – I used to go visiting in the evenings – and they expect you, when you arrive, they expect you to spend four, five hours with them, have supper and this sort of thing. You talk about the weather, the beasts and the farm prices, and you go away having not made any mention of their souls or immortality or the good life or anything like this. You do have this nagging feeling that you've quite enjoyed yourself as a man, but that you haven't really fulfilled any vocation as a priest at all. But then, of course, this pays off in poetry. What you lose on the clerical swings you gain on the poetic roundabout' Poetry Wales (Spring 1972) p50

[439] 'The Prayer' from Laboratories (1975)

[440] 'Tidal' from Mass (1992)

[441] 'The Combat' from Laboratories (1975)

as his prophet and poet, wrestling with language in order to try and meet him, for although it is on the innocent marches of vocabulary that God engages us, yet all we meet is silence. This is the concept of an ever-receding God which Hopkins also articulated within his poetry of edge, horizon, the westering sun. Shepherd believes that we should not refer to the inadequacy of language to express the mystical experience of Presence, but rather we should acknowledge the perfection of a presence which refuses articulation because that articulation itself is linear, fragmented and largely unnecessary[442]. One could go further and say that human articulation will always be inadequate, finite, and most of all, flawed, because of our limited capability to perceive. We are bound by our senses, 'imprisoned' according to both Blake and Hopkins, the raised 'spiritual' body the only thing that can come into contact with, and truly 'know' God. Thomas believes that the true fast is abstention from language[443], that we should meet silence with silence, because to pray true is to 'say nothing'[444].

Where speech fails, gesture takes over - we are, after all, to be judged on our deeds, which mean far more than anything we say: 'No speech; the raised hand affirms/All that is left unsaid'[445]. Prytherch forgives Thomas for his use of him, without words: 'to find/With the slow lifting up of your hand/No welcome, only forgiveness'[446]. And Thomas himself admits that no word could describe his true feelings[447]. Thomas also intimates that language may be irrelevant to God, even although it is so important for us. The ancients spoke to him in Hebrew and he understood, they spoke in Latin and Italian and he understood. Even when speech palled and we turned to the silence of our equations, God listened, and he is still listening[448]. Thomas is left to try and articulate what it is impossible to definitively say. Ward agrees that what we are left with is an inadequate language that is not confident in its power to name and so expresses 'only an incessant yet deferred desire'[449]. It follows from this that any attempt to articulate God only achieves in articulating God's elusiveness, his recession before the poet[450]. What remains is only absence, because our limited human apprehension knows no way of making it present, including finding adequate language that will call it up[451]. Ward concludes that the poet's

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[442] See Shepherd (1996) p188
[443] 'Incarnations' from No Truce (1995)
[444] 'The Letter' from Mass (1992)
[445] 'Peasant Greeting' from Stones (1946)
[446] 'Absolution' from Poetry (1958)
[447] 'Iago Prytherch' from Poetry (1958)
[448] 'Dialectic' from Frequencies (1978)
[449] See Ward (2001) p112
[450] *ibid*
[451] See Ward (2001) p115

search for expression of response to God, is itself that expression[452]. We may not be able to reach God, but we can describe the journey.

Thomas's sense of failure in reaching for God, touching God, or describing God, comprises a dialogic exposition of absence and presence. He is aware that belief in the Trinity, for most of humanity, suggests a nonentity[453]. He aligns himself, as the prophets did, with the people he represents and in the 20th century we merely come round on a 'new gyre' approaching God from the far side, as an extinct concept[454]. In this sense, Thomas articulates the modern sense of an absence of God, of God existing outwith us in void and silence, unattainable, unanswerable. For Hopkins God is definitively *there*, too strong, too powerful, and Hopkins' plaint is about his ongoing treatment within a real relationship. For Blake, God comprised the vast turning wheels of eternal time, huge archetypes working behind visual reality to uphold and move the universe by way of straining contrary forces. The collection Mass for Hard Times (1992) engages with this issue, exploring a changing world with its changing attitudes towards religion, asking where faith is located and whether language is capable of either expression or news of God. Part of Thomas's discipleship of Yahweh is to point our attention toward things that are dying, what we are losing, what the consequences of our 'progress' are. Yet at the same time he asserts that we cannot have, and mistakenly seek, proof of God's existence – we cannot have something to bring back to show that we have met him, a lock of hair perhaps, stolen from him while he was asleep, or a picture of the garden[455]. As Phillips says, this is not how any mediation of religious sense is to be achieved – it is grasped at all only by taking note of its application in human life[456]. In other words it is the act itself that mediates - it is only by doing that we apply spirit to life and make the Kingdom of God, literally, at hand. The description of such a Kingdom is for Thomas, care for our fellow man where 'the consumptive is/Healed' and 'industry is for mending/The bent bones and the minds fractured/By life'[457]. It is open to all and admission is free, for God is portrayed as being inside us, upholding us with his life, each being overflowing with him as a chalice would with the sea[458].

Despite all of these failures which inhere within prophetic and priestly vocation: ineffectuality in mission and ministry, failure in relationship with Yahweh which becomes

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[452] See Ward (2001) p195
[453] 'Play' from No Truce (1995)
[454] 'Eschatology' from Mass (1992)
[455] 'Somewhere' in Laboratories (1975)
[456] Phillips (1986) p94
[457] 'The Kingdom' from H'm (1972)
[458] 'Suddenly' from Laboratories (1975)

one of wrestling and struggle, allied with failure of poetry to connect to God due to inadequacy of language, what does exist for Thomas, and counterbalances these, is his existence in the here and now, the fact of presence itself: 'Forgetting Yesterday,/ignorant of the future,/I take up apartments/in the here and now'[459]. Thomas affirms for all of us that where we are as travellers, is the best place, and he reminds us that inward is the journey[460]. Thomas asserts that within and despite failure, the doing moment is all we have and comprises all we are. Phillips asserts that if God is to have any word in time for the poet, he must 'address him where he is'[461]. Thomas agrees, asking us to pity the simpleton with his mouth open crying 'how far is it to God'? yet also asks us to pity the one with the knowledge who says 'where you were, friend'[462]. The best journey to make is inward – it is the interior that calls[463]. Thomas maintains that only within our own interiors do we exist; it is the place from where we 'selve' and it is the place where we learn and grow. This is where God can be found.

XIII

Thomas's inspired revelation of God is that he comprises the same 'double nature' of the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible. Throughout his poetics he reveals, with Blake, that God is God of both 'Tyger'[464] and 'lamb' who holds us at bay with his symbols, the 'opposed emblems' of hawk and dove. Such a revelation of the extremes of God's power comprises the idea of balance by way of contraries which, following Blake, Thomas seeks to articulate, perceiving Yahweh as God of both the starved fox and the obese pet, the God of both extremes[465]. In the human world, the youth enters the brothel at the same time as a girl enters a nunnery[466], implying that for each thing there exists its opposite, which again maintains cosmic balance and harmony, although we may not fully understand what this is. Thomas perceives balance as being at the heart of Yahweh's sovereignty, that his eye is tearless as he looks at life in its entirety, because the dark is as dear to him as the light. Facing such a God of compassion and judgement, all the poet-prophet can do, as our representative, is pray, yet what can his prayers win for souls brought 'to the bone' to be tortured and who burn throughout history with their own 'strange light'[467].

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[459] 'Flat' in Between (1981)
[460] 'Quest' in Poetry Wales (Spring 1979) p10
[461] Phillips (1986) p145
[462] 'Directions' in Between (1981)
[463] 'Groping' from Frequencies (1978)
[464] Thomas echoes Blake with his own version of 'the tyger' in 'The White Tiger' from Frequencies (1978)
[465] For another example of a Yahwistic God portrayed, see 'The Island' in H'm (1972)
[466] 'Because' in Pietà (1966)
[467] 'After the Lecture' Flowers (1968)

Hopkins too had to 'tame' the lion-like presence of Yahweh which lay against him[468]. This relates to the 'lion' roaring from Zion in Amos, who withers the fields. This is an uncomfortable view of a God who causes the trout to die, just as he also causes man to exist - one creature's pain and death is another's profit[469]. Only God knows how these things work to maintain cosmic balance[470], whilst for us the equation makes no sense[471]. Thomas's personal experience of such a God is revealed by him as being sometimes like a wind carrying him off, sometimes like a fire devouring him, sometimes like the scent at the heart of a great flower, but always he surrounds Thomas like the 'fiercest of raptors'[472]. God therefore shows him two faces, speaks with two voices; there are 'precipices' within him both mild and dire[473].

As well as revealing the character and powers of Yahweh, Thomas also provides us with revelations regarding the earthly realm of the established church. He critiques this, criticising that we have over-furnished our faith, and that our churches are like limousines in the 'procession' towards heaven[474]. Thomas wants a return to a more austere and grounded faith whose bedrock is words and not external, luxurious signs and silverware. The basics should be the clean cross, the bread and wine, the core of faith in God the bare hub of practice. He condemns change, seeing it as a damaging and eroding process, commenting on liturgical reform that we merely devise an idiom that is more compatible with the furniture departments of our churches[475], and it is in this way that our liturgies are made 'bleak', for in revising the language the danger is that we alter the doctrine, and move correspondingly further away from the core truth of religious faith[476]. He is aware that the gaps in our belief are filled with ceremonies and processions, and he worries that we are creating substitutes for the real thing – that we seek to plug the hole in faith with 'faith's substitute grammar'. Thomas's revelations regarding the shortcomings of the established church go hand-in-hand with his belief that religion does not have to be practised there exclusively – it is possible to have a spiritual revelation in other places just as holy. He tells us that the moor was like a church to him[477], and whilst there he feels the

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[468] 'Resurrections' in No Truce (1995)
[469] In the sea 'An endless war is to be seen, one creature mercilessly and continuously devouring another. Under the deceptively innocent surface there are thousands of horrors ... the seals and the cormorants and the mackerel hunt like rapacious wolves. What kind of God created such a world? A God of Love?' Auto (1997) p78; 'We have already heard of the problem of killing as a part of the economy of the God of love. There is also the problem of the inventing mind' p107 *ibid*
[470] 'Pisces' in Song (1955)
[471] 'Silent, Lord' from 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[472] 'The Indians and the Elephant' from No Truce (1995)
[473] 'You show me' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[474] 'God's fool' from 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[475] 'Bleak Liturgies' from Mass (1992)
[476] 'Ever since the Church reformed the Liturgy, I cannot partake of the Sacrament. The new order of the Church in Wales has changed the whole atmosphere of Holy Communion for me' Auto (1997) p131
[477] 'The Moor' from Pietà (1966)

same kind of reverence therefore he enters it 'on soft foot'. Thomas witnesses to spiritual presence in nature – what God is there makes himself felt rather than listened to 'in clean colours' that bring a moistening to the eye, and is present in the movement of wind over the grass. We do not therefore need to go to church and participate in liturgy exclusively in order to come to God. The bright air can crumble and break on us generously as bread – a Eucharistic experience that highlights the sacramentalism of nature. The air can be as rarefied as the interior of a cathedral[478] and the birds can sing like 'God's choir' scattering their praises[479].

Thomas also provides us with his revelation of God as a *via negativa*[480] and a *via positiva*[481]. Within the negative experience is loss, absence and despair, also spiritual drought or the 'dark night' of the soul. Thomas testifies to times when a black frost was upon his whole being and his heart in its 'bone belfry' hung and was dumb[482]. This is similar to Hopkins' experiences as expressed in his Dublin sonnets. Within the contrary positive experience is presence, location, and affirmation, where God definitely is or can be felt and contacted. This is expressed by both poets within poems of celebration, particularly celebration of the natural world where each perceives God as active fiery force upholding by way of 'instress' the inscaped material frame. Dyson comments that if our most serious need today is for identity, for meaning, and for apprehended divinity, then we all must start with the apparent absence of God[483]. Thomas, as our representative, asks on our behalf: 'How can I/find God? Out there?/He is absent. In here?/He is dumb'[484]. God is the void we must be willing to enter[485], even although our experience of him is that he is before us, and always leaving as we arrive[486]. We may in our searching always be met with blank indifference and neutrality[487] but this does not stop the search and Thomas again points us towards nature, within which the grey skies, wet fields and the wind, and the birds singing, can provide us with answers if we just ask the right questions. Thomas turns this around, perceiving God as asking questions of us which *we* fail to answer, and, as if nature itself were the intermediary, portrays nature as answering God on our behalf[488]

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[478] 'Moorland' from Experimenting (1986)
[479] 'Affinity' from Stones (1946)
[480] God is defined through those things which he is not – the way of negation 'providing a means by which we can talk about God' Shepherd (1996) p1
[481] 'the way of affirmation', what God 'is like' Shepherd (1996) p2
[482] 'The Belfry' from Pietà (1966)
[483] Dyson (1981) p295
[484] 'Beauty is ill' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[485] 'He is that' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[486] 'Pilgrimages' from Between (1981)
[487] 'That' from Flowers (1968)
[488] See 'Echoes' from H'm (1972)

- we are the beings who 'ride the echo' of *his* call. Absence is turned into a positive by Thomas, for experiencing it is how we become surer of what we want[489].

Thomas affirms his own positive vision of the actuality of God and the relationship he feels he has with him, that of an invisible power that catches him by the sleeve[490]. Nature articulates the actuality of God as sunlight quivering on a bare wall. God addresses Thomas (and by implication us) from a myriad directions: the fluency of water, the articulateness of green leaves, in the noise of the chain-saw. Weather is the turbine of God's mind. If Thomas listens to the things around him: weeds, stones, instruments, the machine itself, all speak to him in their own 'vernacular' of the purposes of God[491]. Thomas is testifying to God alive in all things around us if we only could hear him speaking with the many voices he has. If we listen we can all receive a message from God delivered by a bird at the window, offering friendship[492].

In the final analysis, for Thomas, God still comes, 'stealthily as of old,/invisible as a mutation,/an echo of what the light/said, when nobody/attended; an impression/of eyes'[493]. All of Thomas's poetry, all of the reality we look at each day, even doubt itself, becomes for Thomas an 'impression of eyes' – what we see depends upon how we see it. This returns us to Thomas's prime objective in articulating his inspired vision of the world. He reveals to us that it is our perception which must change, that we must willingly follow him in a journey towards transfiguration. We must hone our own perceptions, like antennae, to 'pick up' God from the signals that he sends: 'There are antennae within me,/aerials not palpable to the touch,/discriminative of the transmissions/of a being that has nothing/to apprise me of but its presence'[494]. In summary, Thomas reveals that through his eye, looking out, he can see no death. The earth moves, the sea moves, the wind journeys, and all of the creatures embody God: the flowers are his colour, the tides are the precision of his calculations. There is nothing so ample that God does not overflow it, there is nothing so small that his workmanship is not revealed[495]. Thomas both reveals and chastises: we call God dumb with an 'effrontery' beyond pardon[496].

Thomas's revelatory poetry, the inspired articulation of an insighted prophetic analysis, gives us a 'resolving vision' that seeks to provide remedial ways towards adjustment and

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[489] 'Abercuawg' from Frequencies (1978)
[490] 'The Presence' from Between (1981)
[491] 'Suddenly' from Later Poems (1983)
[492] 'The Message' from Destinations (1985)
[493] 'Coming' from Experimenting (1986)
[494] 'Temptation' in Residues (2002)
[495] 'Alive' in Laboratories (1975)
[496] 'Nuclear' from The Way of It (1977)

transformation. He witnesses to the reality of God with his 'double nature' that renders him Yahwistic. He questions the empty trappings of religiosity and advises us where true spirituality might be found. He expresses the human experience of the *via negativa* when faced with the unaccountable absence of God and counters this with his own vision of positivity and affirmation of presence.

XIV

Thomas's faithfulness to vocation, mission and ministry, a vivifying spirituality, and love of his God in spite of absence, came at personal cost. Thomas knew (as Hopkins did) that he was neither popular nor a distinguished preacher[497]. In Manafon he found he had to learn his craft of being a young rector amongst rough and hardened farmers who expected more from him than he could give, and he found that they in turn failed to meet his own ideals[498]. In personal terms Thomas felt a keen sense of both failure and disappointment within his vocation, even to the extent of believing later in life that his prayers had been of no use and his faith had failed[499]. He felt frustrated with his parishioners[500] believing that it was useless speaking of things of the spirit to people who lived an extraordinary hardship on a daily basis[501]. Thomas felt that their strength of character and stoicism exempted them from all that he could teach, rendering both him and his vocation redundant: their very strength a mockery of the 'pale words' in the black Book. His parishioners were already steeped in the reality of life and death; what could he teach them that they did not already know – why should they come 'like sparrows' for prayer crumbs, whose hands already dabble in the world's blood?[502].

Thomas also feels a sense of personal sin and unworthiness, and judges himself harshly knowing he had been careless of the claim of the world's sick, the world's poor, and craven when he himself was in pain – this is the worst hypocrisy for a minister[503]. His memory and thoughts become the bleak reflections which are a 'sad mirror' to the self. He articulates the experience of many when he wishes he could go back and 'undo' what he

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[497] Auto (1997) p80
[498] Auto (1997) p51
[499] 'I have seen/my prayers fall one by one/into that chasm, and faith/was a plank too narrow/for me to tread' 'Space Walking' from Residues (2002)
[500] 'Some of them would have to walk a mile or more to church, and when the time came for him to climb into the pulpit they were starting to doze' Auto (1997) p59
[501] 'What use was it speaking of the life of the spirit to people who lacked some of the normal amenities of the life of the middle classes?' Auto (1997) p52
[502] 'A Priest to His People' from Stones (1946)
[503] 'Judgment Day' from Tares (1961)

did[504]. For our benefit, and to rank himself with our experience, he confesses that he had allowed worldly things to get in the way of his prophetic mission and ministry which was the 'old quest for truth', the reason he was here. His physical needs, being with a woman, pursuit of money, all beguiled him until he lost the use of his perspective, his most important commodity[505]. Losing perspective, losing one's eyes by which one orientates and discriminates, is a dangerous debility and can result in choosing the wrong direction, and becoming lost. These sentiments strongly echo Hopkins' experiences. Thomas endures a personal *anagnorisis*, an epiphany which he admits to us in order that we might be challenged to analyse ourselves and how we see, what things are important to us, the choices we make, the directions in which we go. Again he wishes to take us on a journey with him towards transfiguration by way of his 'resolving vision'.

Thomas knows that he is ineffectual, that he cannot 'close the gap' between himself and the people, between them and God. He, as the people's representative before God, is the *locus* of their redemption, and for him to admit failure means that he cannot save them. In his visits to an elderly parishioner, he has to admit that no bridge joins her world with his, and all he can do is to lean kindly across the abyss[506]. When someone comes to visit him, he is equally ineffectual, admitting to a lack of connection and communication, even hostility is implied[507]. Here, then, is failure to commune and lack of real empathic contact between human beings. However, the fault does not lie entirely with Thomas, and he understands that he must remain positive in the face of disintegration, open-minded with hope, for it is the mind itself that comprises the distance that must be kept open between one's reach and one's grasp – only the mind can bring anything to fruition[508]. He understands (and forgives the fact) that the people's 'hearts' may want him to come near, but their 'flesh' rejects him[509]. He recognises that it is the Priest who has to do the work, and at the expense of self: 'Priests have a long way to go./The people wait for them to come/To them over the broken glass/Of their vows, making them pay/With their sweat's coinage for their correction'. These feelings of failure and ineffectuality, disappointment and frustration, a sense of personal sin and unworthiness, make of his relationship with his parishioners almost a war of attrition, with the Priest being ground down, Jeremiac in his feeling of inutility.

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[504] Hopkins too was acutely aware that his deeds would haunt him: 'There is a day of all the year/When life revisits me, nerve and vein', and took drastic measures to discipline himself. Gardner (1967) 'Pilate' No 80 p116, s8
[505] 'The Casualty' from Laboratories (1975)
[506] 'Ninetieth Birthday' from Tares (1961)
[507] 'The Visit' from Pietà (1966)
[508] 'Phew!' from The Way of It (1977)
[509] 'The Priest' from Flowers (1968)

The minister does not only have to fight the people's intransigence, he also has to battle the intransigence of the natural world. It is his 'enemy' in his mission. As he exhorts 'Beloved, let us love one another', his words are blown to pieces by the 'unchristened' wind in the rafters[510]. Nature, for the parishioners, is more powerful and more prevalent than the Sunday sermon - it invades the church with its profane presence, it claims the parishioners entirely and is a powerful foe. The natural world which surrounds the hill farmers is where the reality of the pain and hardship, the life, death and blood of hill life is located, a reality which can de-humanise the people and make them animal-like, and which undermines the spiritual idealism of the written and spoken religious text and message the minister preaches. Outside is ferocity and death[511], inside is myth and idealism. Reality, however, is where the people measure truth according to the 'pitiless commentary' of the moor and the wind's veto. The people live their lives by other rules and other yardsticks than the minister's.

Thus Thomas's ministry and mission is soured, as it was with the prophets, with the feeling of futility and nihilism: nothing that he can do can make a difference. He is overcome by the realisation that the power he has to help is unequal to his consciousness of need[512]. This is the inevitable conclusion a prophet must reach, ultimately exemplified by Christ's abandonment on the cross. Thomas's faithfulness comes at great cost, but he also knows that success might be measured by saving even one anonymous member of the gambling party at the foot of the cross[513], and this one hope becomes the sole reason to keep going. In the face of nihilism and pointlessness it is easy to believe that religion is over, but Thomas recognises that religion has its phases and cycles just like the moon, a natural ebb and flow of life like the tides, and is a circular force always returning: 'In cities that/have outgrown their promise people/are becoming pilgrims/again'[514]. Not in vain does any minister kneel in a silent church, for the Book may rust in the empty pulpits above empty pews, but the Word ticks inside remorselessly as the bomb that is timed soon to go off[515]. The Word goes on into the future, holding its own message and ready to impart wisdom through other mouths than his. In this context, Ward can rightly claim for Thomas that the sense of the endless quest will continue long after the poet's own finite lifetime has reached its conclusion[516].

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[510] The Minister (1953)
[511] The Minister (1953)
[512] 'Beauty is ill' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[513] 'He atones not' from 'Crucifixion' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[514] 'The Moon in Lleyn' from Laboratories (1975)
[515] 'Waiting' from Welsh Airs (1987)
[516] See Ward (2001) p197

Within ideas of failure and ineffectuality, and the concomitant cost for faithfulness to mission and to God, resides the prophetic experience of edge, exile and marginalisation that means displacement from community and society[517]. Such 'wilderness' experience comes with the reality of personal trial. Wintle believes that although Thomas never expressly identifies himself with Job, a sense of personal trial and of being cast into a wilderness informs several of the poems in The Stones of the Field[518]. Thomas acknowledges his own 'edge' status, saying that he plays a small pipe, a little aside from the main road, but he thanks anyone for listening[519]. Wynn Thomas points out that Thomas, born and educated outwith the Welsh cultural tradition, looked on Prytherch and his kind and saw an affinity there – both he and they were anomalies in Wales[520]. Both may have been anomalies, but for different reasons: Thomas was alienated from much of Welsh country life by his status as an Anglican Priest in the Church in Wales, where the majority were Nonconformist[521]. This meant exclusion from majority religious experience, and meant that Thomas had a minority 'voice'. Ward questions Thomas's ability to speak for Wales in this regard, asking how a staunch defender of a wholly-independent Wales can avow the central importance for social life, of the English established church with its political preferences and its power[522]. Wynn Thomas also highlights Thomas's dubious religious position by noting that part of the paradox of his position in Manafon was that he represented the recently disestablished Anglican Church of Wales. Welsh-speaking farmers would have attended a non-conformist Baptist, Presbyterian or Methodist chapel[523].

Thomas holds his position of marginalised 'outsider' on several fronts: one, by virtue of his chosen minority religion; two, due to his comfortably-off and rather sheltered town upbringing he had no notion of the hardship of country life when he first encountered the Welsh hill farmers and found himself shocked by the reality of its blood and 'phlegm' and the 'uncouth' nature of the farmers themselves; and three, he had no Welsh and spoke with an English accent until the age of thirty when he decided to learn the language. Wintle, who heard Thomas speak, said that his voice was astonishing because its pedigree was so utterly upper-middle-class English. He felt it was like Alec Guinness reading[524]. Furthermore, Thomas's son was educated in England at a public school. These realities

[517] Thomas comments: 'I'm a solitary, I'm a nature mystic; and silence and slowness and bareness have always appealed' Poetry Wales (Spring 1972) p51
[518] See Wintle (1996) p235
[519] See Ward (2001) p72 – quoting Thomas from an address to the Poetry Society.
[520] See Wynn Thomas (1993) p46
[521] Protestants separated from the Church of England through refusing to conform or subscribe to the Act of Uniformity in 1662.
[522] See Ward (2001) p67
[523] See Wynn Thomas (1993) p46-7
[524] See Wintle (1996) p29

undermine Thomas's efforts to return to the true Wales of his imagination by way of poetic reclamation and restitution of Welsh character, history, language and myth. His 'enemies' were delighted at being given such ammunition: by knowing that Gwydion would be educated in England, first at a preparatory school in Shrewsbury, then at Bradfield public school, finally at Magdalen College, Oxford[525].

Apart from such 'public' displacements, Thomas himself was an intensely private man engaged in a personal nomadic journey. Bedient observes that his poems were written one by one, in an 'ecstasy of isolation'[526]. Thomas did not deny this, saying of himself that he was a solitary and a nature mystic, and that silence and slowness and bareness had always appealed[527]. As if to underline this solitariness, Thomas when he retired in 1978, chose to live on the Llŷn Peninsula for nearly 20 years, itself an 'outpost' of Wales because of its promontory character. In his chosen hermit-like existence that involved separation and a 'looking on' rather than a 'being within', Thomas claimed that faced with great developments in technology, the lack of faith in the old traditions, and the omnipresence of the aeroplanes practising above his head in the Llŷn Peninsula, his poetry had become more abstract. He felt however that Llŷn was not an escape, but rather a peninsula where he could be inward with all the tension of the age[528]. This is prophetic displacement: to be 'inward' with knowledge yet 'outward' in expression. If the true Thomas of our imagination exists at all, he exists at the rim, in society's marginal lands, in exile from our materiality and our idols, in order that he can tell us about ourselves. His is the voice from beyond ourselves that holds up a mirror to us and to what we do, in order that we might listen and be changed. It is in such a wilderness replete with connection, that he communes with his God: 'through seeing the old comely things that I loved disappearing ... I turned increasingly to bird-watching. Away from the din and violence of the world, away from man's apathy and cruelty ... it is lovely ... to spend an hour or two out on the rocks ... comparing the waiting for a migrant bird with the waiting for a vision of God'[529].

Thomas knows his own marginalisation and alienation, and he equates this with the memory of being on his knees on a church porch in Manafon in 1942, in which position he was neither inside nor outside, but on the border between the two, 'a ready symbol of contemporary man'[530]. Thomas is himself the symbol and the living sign of the times, enacting in his marginalised kneeling all of our experiences of displacement and

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[525] See Wintle (1996) p199
[526] Bedient (1974) p59
[527] Poetry Wales (Spring 1979) p12
[528] Auto (1997) p151
[529] Auto (1997) p144
[530] Auto (1997) p78

fragmentation, of disharmony and disunity, of being neither inside nor out but on the border between the two: the marginal land. Thomas as sign, represents us at the same time as he provides us with the necessary criticism of what we are. On our margins he feels he is also on the margin of eternity and dissolution, with nothing but the self looking up at the self looking down. It is from bottomless fathoms that he dredges-up the truth[531]. In 'Boundaries'[532] he discusses the idea of the margin, where it might be, and whether or not it is a truthful marker for there are in reality no differences between us. With the image of the margin Thomas seeks to close the gap – he asks where the town ends and the country begins? We are all of us simply people: not town people, or country people, or rich people, or poor people - just people, human beings, and we all walk our own invisible margin, remembering glory. Thomas's status at the edge resides within his vocation: 'I was the chapel pastor, the abrupt shadow/Staining the neutral fields, troubling the men/ ... with my glib, dutiful praise/Of a fool's world; a man ordained for ever/To pick his way along the grass-strewn wall/Dividing fact from truth'[533]. He is at the wall, looking on, and cannot take the step to come down on one side or the other, for it is up to him not to take any side at all but be faithful to God's.

Belief is arduous and oscillating, and it exacts a high cost from the practitioner. Thomas believes that God has it so, in order that we might be tried and find a love we do not even understand. This is torment and reward together 'in precarious balance' with neither giving ground to the other[534]. Thomas witnesses to this, to the experience of cost, the cost of his faith and all his effort at vocation: 'Windy and wet, and what is/worse the weather within/wicked: wounds and the heart's/woe, when all should be well./Ah, waif spirit, will you not wake/once again to wonder and worship?'[535]. He looks out on a grey world, grey with despair[536]. Thomas's despair is that of failure and ineffectuality, that in spite of all his efforts he cannot 'close the gap' between himself and his parishioners who remain on the margins of faith – they listen to him preaching the unique gospel of love, but their eyes never meet, the transaction is refused. In 'Service'[537], the Minister and his parishioners stand looking at each other, he offers them faith but they hand back the present. He is left with a feeling of failure, of despair and isolation, of marginalisation, of being 'left alone' within the lives of the people around him and within 'the emptiness of this place', for

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[531] 'Fathoms' from No Truce (1995)
[532] from No Truce (1995)
[533] The Minister (1953)
[534] See Ward (2001) p192
[534] 'What is more exciting, more likely to lift the heart after a period of stormy weather, than seeing the blue start in the west, before slowly spreading over the sky to allow the sun to appear and the sea itself to turn blue? This is a symbol for the lifting of a burden from the soul after a period of despair' Auto (1997) p79
[535] 'Anybody's Alphabet' from No Truce (1995)
[536] The Minister (1953)
[537] from Pietà (1966)

nothing he does makes any difference. Thomas wrestles with God like Jacob[538] wrestling with the Angel at Peniel (Genesis 32), wrestles with his vocation, his ministry, his feeling of displacement and edge which are his wilderness where he, paradoxically, communes with his God, yet with men his hopes are confounded. He is left alone, with no echoes to the amen he dreamed of. He exists within dislocation and lack of connection, no-one comes towards him and what he offers. He himself becomes the 'last outpost of time past' toward which the tide of grass creeps perpetually nearer[539].

Thomas as prophet and poet may exist on the edge of civilisation and the edge of time, yet he remains the 'observer' who sees what he sees: 'the golden landscape/Of nature, with the twisted creatures/Crossing it, each with his load'[540]. He watches us through 'the gap in the hedge', claiming us and our attention, the voice of warning sounding from the other side of the abyss. He may exist at 'the bare field's edge', marginalised, displaced, in exile, but he is the knowing centre of our world sending out his vocabulary like a 'new Noah' despatched to alight awhile on steel branches[541]. His heart's poetry like blood runs down through his pen and he knows he is not like most men[542]. Thomas articulates his heart, voicing prophetic ideals of morality, spirituality, law, within his penned words, his poetry marching onward through time, while the spent cities and dry hearts that cannot bleed, smoke in its wake. Despite his faithfulness and its cost, Thomas makes the poem, and he makes it now[543].

XV

In conclusion, we watch Thomas fighting within his poetics to bring to reality a vision that incorporates his critique of the reality of *what is* whilst at the same time aiming to bring before us the potential of what he believes *should be*. His poetics comprise a gifted vision of the ideal, transmitted through a compelled utterance that claims to be didactic and exhortatory. He wants us to take a hard look at ourselves, at our perspectives, at how and why we judge, by what window we look at the world - and understand through our relationship with nature, with each other, and with the 'other' we call God, that we can be changed, can change in our turn, and make the difference that will bring the Kingdom of God closer to our hands. He tries to transfigure the way we look at the world, disturb the

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[538] 'There will be no peace in the world/so long as the angel resists me' 'I want ...' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[539] 'The Village' from Song (1955)
[540] 'The Observer' from Flowers (1968)
[541] 'Vocabulary' from Destinations (1985)
[542] 'Pharisee. Twentieth Century' from Tares (1961)
[543] 'The Maker' from Tares (1961)

mundane, the ordinary and the habit, and break through to us in order that we might behave differently, close the gap and complete the circle of all things that distance and alienate. He fights, as Blake fights, with his 'bow of burning gold' and his 'chariot of fire', within the real world for a real vision of the ideal that can be achieved: Jerusalem brought down to earth. He voices in his last collection his belief that he is one of art's mercenaries, firing his thought's arrows at the mystery of things[544]. In so doing, he brings hidden things to light.

Today's prophet may be preoccupied with the present, that 'non-point at which a paradoxical future paves the way to the past'[545], but Thomas as prophet reflects and refracts all times at once – he has been Stone Man[546], Renaissance Man, is Modern Man seeing forests of steel growing from the human libido[547]. He reveals to us the breadth of human history from our incipient beginnings as 'gilled man' to quadruped man, to man erect and peering into his future[548]. He perceives our journey *sub specie aeternitatis*, man forever striving to stand upright from the blow of the Fall – in order to be redeemed man is forever rising 'from on all fours endlessly to begin'[549]. Thomas reveals our physical metamorphoses which are our markers of 'progress': the advancement in language, technology, understanding, the ongoing labelling of our world as we discover new things, our multiplicity of lenses by which we gaze inward to ever-smaller particles of life, or gaze outward towards infinite distance, and he watches us ignore the present and what we do to our common life and ourselves. His visionary poetic becomes a prophetic plea for realignment of perspective, adjustment of perception: we must reverse our lenses, amend our looking, because in spite of our so-called 'progress' we have not come far. We walk, a species that has turned its gaze back in, not to discover its 'incipient wings' but rather the slime and quagmire from whence it emerged[550].

Thomas's own prophetic evolution within his poetics moves from a focus on the agrarian and the hill-farmers living with hardship on the land, towards an engagement with technology and the machine as markers of our spiritual decline, and a corresponding focus on science as the evil (and opposite) element to the imagination and to poetry. Thomas progresses inward to ever more minute elements of life like the atom and the gene, and

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[544] 'Paving' from Residues (2002)
[545] 'Anybody's Alphabet' from No Truce (1995)
[546] 'Apace' from Residues (2002)
[547] cf also 'Perspectives' from Later Poems (1983) which further discusses Thomas's idea of evolutionary progress.
[548] 'The Refusal' from Mass (1992)
[549] 'This page' from 'BC' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[550] 'We must reverse our lenses' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990); cf Hopkins: 'Our make and making break, are breaking, down/To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime' 'The Sea and the Skylark' Gardner (1967) No 35 p68

outward toward the far reaches of space[551]. This prophetic evolution involves in itself a shift of vision and a personal nomadic journey as Thomas moves in slow perambulation around Wales until he comes back to a promontory from which he can gaze backward across 40 miles and 40 years to where he was born and raised[552]. In this way, his prophetic insightedness moves inexorably from the core of life to its circumference, encompassing the microcosmic and the macrocosmic within an all-embracing vision of God. Whilst his poetic content changes, his style does not – this remains consistent, like an underlying diachronic marker of continuity beneath the shifting surfaces of his attention.

The answer, if we require one, to both our forward progress and our past evolution is with us in the present moment by way of our will, choice, intent, deed. Thomas pleads for synthesis, where the imperatives of the instinct are in abeyance and the mind and heart work together[553]. Thomas provides us with prophetic poetry that is a site for the repair of promises, a place where we can pick-up the pieces of our smashed dream. Here we can reclaim Eden, find a redeemed and transfigured vision, the place that is a timeless place within where our 'unaccommodated moments' can be rescued, innocent as when we began with the ripening apple 'never to fall' from the branches of truth's tree. We are all the 'poor of the world' invited by Thomas to the marriage of the 'here and now' where we must address our own shortcomings. He wants us to achieve the necessary turning towards ourselves with a reversal of values that must incorporate a reversal of our lenses in order that we hold money, gain, oppression, violence, greed, in abhorrence, that we do not 'trample the poor in the gate' and that we seek spirit in unlikely places.

The approach to God, by way of his prophet's words, has to be a direct one. We must take the direct route through the carrying out of willed choices that help us to correctly orientate ourselves within the journey and enable us to walk in harmony with one another, and thereby with God. Thomas exhorts us to find God within our active practice of community, within the practice of love and care, not its worded description, and if we find our cathedrals and churches empty, he bids us visit the forest, stand still and listen. All three of our poets/priests/prophets are involved in encouragement of *praxis*, not a stilled and negative stasis at the edge of life looking on. They exhort an active 'selving' that knows God through creating change within the quotidian moment and the deeds of our hands to mar or mend.

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[551] Amos takes-in a similar sweep, moving the purposes of God from the small and close-up on ground level to the infinity of space: 'Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, *Seek him* that maketh the seven stars and Orion' (Amos 5: 7-8)
[552] Auto (1997) p77
[553] 'The imperatives' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)

Thomas's own prophetic answer to his many questions is that 'silence is the message' and his instruction is to 'wait' because ultimately the meaning is in the waiting. In the interstices between here and now, in the face of all of life's contradictions, all we have is the choice to act, and to take Jesus's cry of dereliction from the cross - which was answered by silence – as a sign that he got on with the deed in spite of that silence. Thomas's hope for us is that we realise the meaning of life as well as the presence of God within the meaning of the deed, for action is inspiriting: 'you are not there/When I turn, but are in the turning,/Gloria'[554].

[554] 'Gloria' section of 'Mass for Hard Times' from Mass (1992)

Chapter Five

William Blake: The Spirit of Prophecy in The True Man[1]

> Then tell me, what is the material world, and is it dead?
> He laughing answer'd: I will write a book on leaves of flowers,
> If you will feed me on love-thoughts, & give me now and then
> A cup of sparkling poetic fancies; so when I am tipsie,
> I'll sing to you to this soft lute; and shew you all alive
> The world, when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy.[2]

I

Blake is probably the most easily identifiable example of prophet as compared with the two others here discussed, in that his life's work as poet, printer, painter, and self-confessed prophet was specifically focussed upon elucidating the causes of evil by way of a visionary sensibility, and using such prophetic insightedness to point to a different (and possible) way of being that proposed the ideal of community to be a crucial factor within human social life and experience[3]. Human experience involving choice, orientation, deed, is paramount for Blake and it is to this that he speaks, typifying the prophet and seer because of the priority that he gives to experience[4]. It is the hypocrisy of organised oppression within morality and within the structure of society which Blake attacks in his 'dual role of prophet and revolutionary'[5].

Blake's prophetic role of exhortation, warning, complaint, is grounded in personal experience of contemporary life allied to a vision of eternal time. His utterance is founded on personal communication with 'divine messengers' and his tenacity upheld by moral conviction. Frye believes that Blake had a very strong sense of personal responsibility both to God and to society to keep on producing the kind of imaginative art he believed in[6], because he believed that his art could, literally, make a difference to the world. In this

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[1] All Religions Are One Principles 1-7 Complete Poems (1977) p77
[2] Europe A Prophecy additional plate iii lines 13-18 Complete Poems (1977) pp225-6
[3] See **Figure 1**, the Frontispiece of All Religions Are One: 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness', reproduced from William Blake. William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000. p18 (hereinafter cited as Thames & Hudson) - in his self-appointed task of prophet, working within the wilderness of contemporary London, he may have been pointing and uttering but few were listening.
[4] Peter F Fisher. The Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary. Ed. Northrop Frye. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961. Preface px
[5] Fisher (1961) pp3-4
[6] Northrop Frye. Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947. p4

respect, Blake was knowingly 'radical in thought, word and deed'[7], his poetry of social protest providing a unique commentary on human thought and action.

II

Blake attests to the compulsion he experiences and he believes he should continue to work in the way he thinks right: 'I find more & more that my Style of Designing is a Species by itself. & in this which I send you have been compelld by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led if I were to act otherwise it would not fulfill the purpose for which alone I live ... I could not do otherwise, it was out of my power!'[8]. Blake testifies to his experience of compulsion by 'divine' agency: 'I hope that none of my Designs will be destitute of Infinite Particulars which will present themselves to the Contemplator. And tho I call them Mine I know that they are not Mine being of the same opinion with Milton when he says That the Muse visits his Slumbers & awakes & governs his Song when Morn purples The East. & being also in the predicament of that prophet who says I cannot go beyond the command of the Lord to speak good or bad'.

Blake's prophetic compulsion is personified by Los, who takes on a mantle of prophetic wrath that is compelled by both moral conviction and divine instruction[9]:

> ... the vast solid
> With a crash from immense to immense
> Crack'd across into numberless fragments
> The Prophetic wrath, strug'ling for vent
> Hurls apart, stamping furious to dust
> And crumbling with bursting sobs; heaves
> The black marble on high into fragments[10]

As if destroying Moses' tablets, Los seeks to destroy edict and law, physical oppression and spiritual imprisonment, anything that is fixed and delineated, by opposing the rigid and limiting by way of a vigorous defence of its opposite. The act of pulling down, uprooting, destroying and overthrowing is taken decisively and without hesitation in a fury that is grounded in moral conviction. If prophetic wrath compels him, vision empowers him: instead of what should be, Los sees what really is:

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[7] William Vaughan. William Blake. London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 1999. p7
[8] Letter to Trusler, August 16, 1799 quoted in The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake. Ed: David V Erdman. New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, 1988. (hereinafter cited as Erdman) p701
[9] Jeremiah 1: 9-10
[10] The Book of Los Chapter II lines 16-22 Complete Poems (1997) p269

> Instead of Albions lovely mountains & the curtains of Jerusalem
> I see a Cave, a Rock, a Tree deadly and poisonous, unimaginative:
> Instead of the Mutual Forgivenesses, the Minute Particulars, I see
> Pits of bitumen ever burning: artificial Riches of the Canaanite
> Like Lakes of liquid lead: instead of heavenly Chapels, built
> By our dear Lord: I see Worlds crusted with snows & ice;
> I see a Wicker Idol woven round Jerusalems children. I see
> The Canaanite, the Amalekite, the Moabite, the Egyptian:
> By Demonstrations the cruel Sons of Quality & Negation[11]

Blake presents a distinction between the finite, temporal world or realm comprising 'real' life as we know it with all of its evil, and the infinite, eternal realm wherein the 'ideal' is situated along with our lost 'goodness'. He perceives our world as a Fallen one, yet one in which we must strive to recreate Eden and reach for redemption in spite of our human frailty. It is our visionary imagination which can take us there and enable us to transcend materiality: 'Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably ... This World of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite & Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature'[12].

Blake is compelled to show us the way things are in this 'Vegetable Glass of Nature', holding up a mirror to ourselves to examine how we live, why we live and make the choices we do, and how our lives and choices affect other people. At the same time, he is compelled to show us the way things could (and should) be, 'what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably' from which world he sources visions of how we can change and grow for the better and become nearer to 'The Divine Image'[13] as opposed to remaining 'The Human Abstract'[14]. Blake believed that the things imagination can see are as real as 'gross' and 'tangible' facts. He would tell his artist-friends that they possessed the same faculty as he, the faculty of the visionary, except that they neither trusted nor cultivated it. They were capable of seeing what he could see, if only they chose to do so[15].

Blake considered the imagination to be a liberating faculty, and one that needed to be cultivated if it were to restrain, by counteracting, the dangerous coldness and clinicality of reason which he knew could inflict great harm on others as well as oneself:

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[11] Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 38 [43] lines 59-67 Complete Poems (1997) p709
[12] Mona Wilson. The Life of William Blake. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. London: Oxford University Press, 1971. p107
[13] See 'The Divine Image' in Songs of Innocence
[14] See 'The Human Abstract' in Songs of Experience
[15] Alexander Gilchrist. The Life of William Blake. Ed. W Graham Robertson. New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1998. p339

> The tigers of wrath called the horses of instruction from their mangers
> They unloos'd them & put on the harness of gold & silver & ivory
> In human forms distinct they stood round Urizen prince of Light
> Petrifying all the Human Imagination into rock & sand[16]

Blake presents the polarity of Los and Urizen as representative opposing forces. This binary appears repeatedly throughout Blake's works, reflecting his concern for behaviour and orientation, and emphasising the importance of choice underpinning deed. Los, as a personification of Blake himself, is compelled to act in defence of freedom and in defiance of tyranny, with divine agency coming to his aid: 'Los stood before his Furnaces ... And the Divine hand was upon him, strengthening him mightily'[17]. Los, compelled by 'Prophetic wrath' perpetually tries to 'bind' Urizen (contain him, imprison him) so that imagination can be freed and the iron rule of ratio and reason be fettered in order that it cannot harm[18]. Los's fall[19], like the fall of Milton's Satan from the crystal battlements, is an incessant and repeating fall 'Years on years, and ages on ages ... day & night without end'. Los falls from Heaven to Earth in order to commune with men, representing and partaking of both the heavenly and earthly simultaneously, at once eternal and temporal, compelled to be what he is: an unearthly presence on earth with a task to perform.

Blake's compulsion to be what he is, and to speak out of a sure vocation, stems from his knowledge of and contact with divine agency. Like the ancient prophets he is aware of the blindness and deafness of his peers and he invokes divine aid in order to reach them through their imaginative and visionary selves, dispelling the delineations of reason: 'O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings!/That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose./For Bacon & Newton sheathed in dismal steel, their terrors hang/Like iron scourges over Albion. Reasonings like vast Serpents/Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations'[20]. He asks aid from God to do his task and has a clear vision of what his task is. Blake is consistently aware of higher powers active within his life and, often, controlling his actions: 'Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song/Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms ... Come into my hand/By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm/From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry/The Eternal Great Humanity Divine, planted his Paradise'[21]. This

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[16] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night The Second, Page 25 lines 3-6 Complete Poems (1997) p303 [Manuscript in pen and ink and pencil with marginal illustrations]
[17] Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 42 lines 55-56 Complete Poems (1997) p717
[18] The Book of Los Chapter IV
[19] The Book of Los Chapter II lines 27-36 Complete Poems (1997) p269
[20] Jerusalem Chapter I Plate 15 lines 9-13 Complete Poems (1997) pp661-2
[21] Milton Book The First lines 1-8 Complete Poems (1997) p514

is an invocation to the Muses[22] who are able to inspire his mind and stir his hand to write. For Blake inspiration is the manifestation of external divine agency, and makes of him a poet and a prophet as channel for a higher power, his work the *locus* where the human and divine mingle. The inspiration which Blake experienced links with the compulsion he felt to utter, and both served the cause of truth as he saw it. He spoke to the heart of humanity, to its darkness as well as its light, his utterances comprising the prophetic task which for Blake meant a strong personal sense of responsibility both to God and to society. This responsibility Blake took very seriously.

III

The experience of being compelled, allied to the experience of being inspired, come together within prophetic call or commissioning. There is within this experience not only a reaction of inadequacy on the part of the prophet himself, but also an understanding of the opposition he is likely to face. Paley concurs, commenting that the Prophets were frequently rejected and even imprisoned by those whom they sought to help[23]. Blake experienced rejection in his own lifetime and was labelled as eccentric and mad[24], and he was consistently dogged by other people's lack of understanding of his unique genius and vision. However for Blake, his direct experience of God's presence in his life made up for such a lack of appreciation: 'I am in Gods presence night & day/And he never turns his face away'[25]. His commissioning to God's service is unremitting: the theme of Jerusalem, that of the 'Sleep' of 'Ulro'[26] and of the passage of man through 'Eternal Death' and of his awakening to 'Eternal Life' calls Blake from his sleep night after night and every morning wakens him at sunrise[27]. Blake's 'theme' is the fall of Albion (man) away from Jesus, involving a wrenching and a division, that is a fall to materialism and evil. His theme is also the labours of Los[28] (Blake himself) who embodies man's visionary and creative powers in order to regenerate and restore, with the ultimate aim of reuniting man with God. Percival summarises Blake's 'theme': man's origin is not temporal but eternal; however, man has forgotten his eternal origin, and through this forgetting has acquired a mortal body

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[22] For fallen mankind Beulah is the way back to Eden: it is the subconscious, and the source of poetry - see Complete Poems (1997) p1045

[23] Morton D Paley. The Continuing City: William Blake's *Jerusalem*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. p236

[24] cf Hosea 9: 7: 'The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!'

[25] Notebook epigrams and satiric verses c1808-12 Complete Poems (1997) p630

[26] 'Ur + low. The world of pure materialism and delusion, the basest condition to which Man can sink' Complete Poems (1997) p1056

[27] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 lines 1-4 Complete Poems (1997) p637

[28] Paley (1983) describes Los as 'Old Testament Prophet, New Testament Evangelist, Miltonic Seraph, ancient British Bard, the classical Hephaistos/Vulcan, alchemist, blacksmith, and watchman ; and in all these roles he is the Imagination of Humanity, shaping our perception of Time, perceiving history as a coherent shape, building the great city of Golgonooza' p234; Los is also 'Blake's creative identity' and representative Christ-figure, 'the archetypal prophet-poet who labours to save Albion' *ibid* p234; 'Blake's method is syncretic ... one or other aspect of a figure may dominate, but all are combined in an identity that we perceive as an integral whole' *ibid* p234

and a temporal universe. How man endures this change from the eternal to the temporal is the story of the Fall[29].

Blake testifies to his experience of call and commissioning in Jerusalem[30] where he hears God speak 'in thunder and in fire!/Thunder of Thought, & flames of fierce desire:/Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear,/Within the unfathomd caverns of my Ear./Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:/Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony'. This is a statement of contact and dialogue with God as Blake hears God's voice directly in his own ear, giving him the understanding that his commissioning, his 'print' and 'types', are not in vain but will contribute to the redemption of the human race. Blake is shown that all of Los's tools will work together to fight the evil and chaos of the fallen temporal world: 'the saw, and the hammer, the chisel, the pencil, the pen, and the instruments/Of heavenly song sound in the wilds once forbidden, to teach the laborious plowman/And shepherd deliver'd from clouds of war, from pestilence, from night-fear, from murder,/From falling, from stifling, from hunger, from cold, from slander, discontent and sloth' until finally 'The mild peaceable nations be opened to heav'n, and men walk with their fathers in bliss'[31]. Blake sees 'Disease arise' upon humanity[32] and he holds a dialogue with us where he exhorts, questions, pleads, wanting us to look inside ourselves in order to question, probe, and change the way we are. He commissions us as he has been commissioned, in order that we too, as active individuals, can contribute to his great redemptive task that is ultimately our own.

IV

Blake attests to his call and commissioning, his awareness of God's active presence within his life, by way of the inspired revelations he experiences. He manifests these phenomena by way of his visual media which are in turn revelatory to us. Blake illustrates his inspiration, for example, within the two frontispieces to the Songs of Innocence and Of Experience[33]. He locates his pipers within pastoral *milieux*, providing a link to the past which stretches back through Milton, Spenser, Virgil and Theocritus to Hesiod. Blake's prophetic muse becomes a conflation of both the Christian and Classical Muses first

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[29] Milton O Percival. William Blake's Circle of Destiny. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938. p165
[30] Plate 3 'To the Public' lines 30-35 Complete Poems (1997) p636
[31] The French Revolution Page 12 lines 231-4 & 237 Complete Poems (1997) p175
[32] Jerusalem Plate 38 [43] lines 71-79 Complete Poems (1997) p710
[33] See **Figure 2** Frontispiece to Songs of Innocence and **Figure 3** Frontispiece to Songs of Experience - Thames & Hudson (2000) p44, p70

achieved by Milton in Paradise Lost[34]. He sees himself as the piper, the shepherd in the fields who stops his song in order to hear the music of 'an angel's tongue'. When the angel speaks, he hears the voice of heaven, and this cleanses him[35]. In the 'Introduction' to Songs of Innocence, this inspiration experience deepens to become dialogic rather than mere passive hearing: the piper is first to pipe, then sing, then write. There is progression here from a singular and personal experience of divine agency to testimony aimed at us as readers/hearers. The transition moves from mere sound, through human voice, to the written word, comprising increased complexity of communication and transformation from the immediate and oral (that is quickly lost) to the literary and lasting. The same transition from orality to literacy can be seen within the prophetic texts, particularly Jeremiah, with the aim of moving the message outward from a central point in time in order to reach a wider (future) audience.

Blake's portrayal of inspiration goes through a transition from the frontispiece of Innocence to the frontispiece of Experience. In the former the child/angel and the youth are separate beings, the angel floating freely above the male figure, the youth turned towards his inspiration, and they gaze at one another in a private transaction. The latter sees the child/angel and man united, as if the man has captured the Muse (or been captured by it) and it has become part of himself, a single entity. A parabola from youth to age has been tracked by the movement of one day from sunrise to sunset. Both plates elucidate the progression from one experience of inspiration to another and provide contrary principles. They portray metamorphosis from one state to another: what was separate is now united, what was young and raw is now mature and contained.

Blake himself repeatedly testified within his works to his direct experience of inspiration, believing that the felt experience provided him with proof of his call to task and his commissioning from God[36], and he was ever-hopeful of this ongoing certainty: 'Hope, like a Cordial, innocent, tho' strong,/Man's Heart, at once, inspirits, and serenes'[37]. He illustrated Edward Young's Night Thoughts, this plate in particular showing a six-winged angel inspiring the poet as he writes[38]. It is an ancient idea, that it was the Holy Spirit that spoke by the prophets[39]. Blake believed that the same spirit continued to speak by artists

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[34] Lily B Campbell discusses these progressions in 'The Christian Muse'. The Huntington Library Bulletin. HLB 8 (October 1935) 29-70.
[35] 'Song' from 'Poetical Sketches' Blake's Poetry and Designs. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson & John E Grant. New York: W W Norton & Co, 1979. p7 (hereinafter cited as Norton)
[36] Blake responded to his perception of the personality of God, not to the rational demands of a logical theology.
[37] Edward Young's Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality Night VII Page 72 lines 1465-6 from Robin Hamlyn & Michael Phillips. William Blake. London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 2000. p56 (hereinafter cited as Tate Gallery)
[38] See **Figure 4** Edward Young's Night Thoughts Night VII p 72 Tate Gallery (2000) p56
[39] Frye (1947) p52

who have prophetic imaginations. He saw the inspiration which artists have as being the breath or spirit of God which dwells within them, and that such inspiration is the only proof we have of the existence of a spiritual power greater than ourselves: art is 'the gift of God, the Holy Ghost'[40]. Frye sees inspiration as the artist's empirical proof of the divinity of his imagination, and believes it to be divine in origin no matter how it was received. He agrees with Blake's idea that all imaginative and creative acts were eternal and worked towards the building-up of a permanent structure, which Blake called Golgonooza, that was above time[41].

Blake's experience of inspiration upheld the reason for his existence, saying of Vala or The Four Zoas: 'I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation & even against my Will ... an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long Life all produced without Labour or Study. I mention this to shew you what I think the Grand Reason of my being brought down here'[42]. This statement is redolent of Milton's 'unpremeditated verse' and prefigures the experience of Hopkins: 'He hath put a new song in my mouth,/The words are old, the purport new,/And taught my lips to quote'[43]. Hopkins experienced his inspiration as being: 'The fine delight that fathers thought'[44] and he likened this male 'insemination' to flame and fire[45]. Thomas also testified to his experience of inspiration: 'I went down to Ty'n Parc lane and saw the dew hanging from the branches, and heard the redpoll and the siskin going past. And without warning and without effort a little poem formed in my mind. It is so lovely when they come of their own accord like this'[46]. Blake directly linked inspiration with Christ, saying of Jerusalem that it was not only dictated to him[47], but when it was he saw 'the Saviour over me/Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song'[48]. Blake also believed his inspiration to be linked with the workings of Eternity: 'Inspiration & Vision was then & now is & I hope will always Remain my Element my Eternal Dwelling place'[49]. He believed inspiration and vision to be human

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[40] A Descriptive Catalogue Erdman (1988) p46
[41] Frye (1947) p91
[42] Letter to Butts, April 1803 Erdman (1988) p729
[43] 'He hath abolished the old drouth', lines 4-6, written July 1864 Gardner (1967) No 8 p18
[44] 'To R.B.' Gardner (1967) No 76 p108 Hopkins' last poem written Dublin April 1889
[45] '... the strong/Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,/Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came/Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song'; cf 'The mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure' Percy Bysshe Shelley A Defence of Poetry from Norton Anthology II (1993) p761
[46] Auto (1997) p165; (cf Hopkins' comment on a poem being composed as a result of an hour or so of 'extreme enthusiasm' whilst walking by the Elwy); further: 'It is lovely to think of inspiration, that 'Pan y myn y daw,/Fel yr enfys a'r glaw', 'It comes when it wills,/Like the rainbow and the rain'. And certainly, as with a poem, it is thus that He sometimes chooses to come' *ibid* p166
[47] 'To The Public' Plate 3 line 41 Complete Poems (1997) p637
[48] Chapter 1 Plate 4 lines 4-5 Complete Poems (1997) p638
[49] Annotations to the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds Erdman (1988) pp660-1

powers that were gifts of God, and that poetry as it exists on earth is inspiration and 'cannot be surpassed; it is perfect and eternal', the human mind not able to go beyond the gift of God, the Holy Ghost[50]. Blake also saw his own works as lasting things, saying that Jerusalem would speak to future generations through its 'Sublime Allegory' which was perfectly completed into a Grand Poem: 'I may praise it since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity I consider it as the Grandest Poem that This World Contains. Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry'[51].

In a letter to Flaxman, on arriving at Felpham, Blake testified that in that place the 'voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard & their forms more distinctly seen & my Cottage is also a Shadow of their houses'[52]. The figure of 'The Ancient of Days' seems to have been inspired by a vision which hovered over his head at the top of his staircase in Hercules Buildings[53]. Furthermore, Blake believed that Europe had been dictated to him[54], and Plate 36 of Milton[55] shows an Angel of inspiration descending towards Blake in his garden at Felpham[56]. The 'voices' dictating words to Blake render him part of an ongoing continuum. As inspired prophet and scribe of God Blake is an inheritor of ancient tradition: 'The God of the seer was the Creator, and creative activity was the characteristic of the true prophet's existence'[57].

Blake's inspired revelations have the power to 'transfigure the commonplace'. Through his words and visual media Blake tries to *renovate* man's moments and he perceives these as contributing to man's redemption because of the active fire of God infusing them, upholding the quotidian moment:

> There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find[58]
> Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
> This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found
> It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed[59]

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[50] Erdman (1988) p544
[51] Letter to Butts, July 6, 1803 Erdman (1988) p730
[52] Letter to Flaxman, Sept 21, 1800 Erdman (1988) p710
[53] Tate Gallery (2000) p176 from source: Bentley 1969 Blake Records pp470-1
[54] Europe Plate iii lines 22-24 Complete Poems (1997) p226
[55] See **Figure 5** Milton Plate 36 'Blake's Cottage at Felpham' Thames & Hudson (2000) p284
[56] cf also Milton Plate 36 lines 5-8 & 18-20 Complete Poems (1997) pp593-4
[57] Fisher (1961) p5
[58] cf: 'There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find/Nor his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent & has many Angles/But he who finds it will find Oothoons palace, for within/Opening into Beulah every angle is a lovely heaven' Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 37 [41] lines 15-18; also 'By Satans Watch-fiends tho' they search numbering every grain/Of sand on Earth every night, they never find this Gate./It is the Gate of Los' Jerusalem Chapter II Plate 35 [39] lines 1-3
[59] Milton Book the Second Plate 35 lines 42-45

Blake consistently emphasises that the 'minute particulars' - the small things, the small attentions to detail, the individual unique moments of thought, choice and deed - count for ourselves and our own lives, as well as the relationships we have. Blake sees all things as interlinked, each element affecting the other, nothing existing outwith the whole, all things coming together to form that whole. 'There is a Moment' relates to these, as it does to the actual moment of inspiration itself when an individual's 'fragmentary understanding suddenly becomes integrated and unified'[60]. Blake sees this individual, unique moment existing within a wider timescale and endeavour:

> But others of the Sons of Los build Moments & Minutes & Hours
> And Days & Months & Years & Ages & Periods; wondrous buildings

Glen, in discussing Blake's Songs, observes that they begin with 'lively portrayals of a familiar world' and end with 'direct and urgent appeals to the reader' which combine to 'show how imaginative recognition of the existence of others can lead to a confidence in the possibility of a transforming change within a shared actuality'[61]. In this way, the Songs affirm 'human freedom' and provide images of 'alternative possibility'[62]. The poem 'London'[63] shows that the ills of society can be traced to 'objective' manacles of repression, but can also be traced to the 'subjective' failings of human nature[64]. Glen sees this poem as 'more like the voice of a 'marking' prophet ... a prophet whose 'marking' is also that of the artist, disclosing the hidden logic of a whole society in a way which transcends rational analysis, creating something which becomes independent of – and capable of questioning – his own activity, as the work of art achieves a revelatory life beyond anything its creator may consciously have intended'[65]. However, Glen sees the fragmentation and abuse that 'London' portrays as not being something imposed by an unchangeable social order, but rather the inevitable result of particular, chosen modes of relating to others that are manifested within a whole society[66]. Blake's inspiration is expressive of an 'insighted' vision that exposes and reveals, that ultimately shows choice, orientation, navigation, as being in our own hands. He believes that we continually hold within us the possibility for change. Blake's inspired and visionary works present his unique view of a spiritual morality that he believes should hold a fundamental place within human culture[67].

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[60] 'There is a Moment' Complete Poems (1997) notes p983
[61] Heather Glen. Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's *Songs* and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. p197
[62] Glen (1983) p198
[63] Complete Poems (1997) p128
[64] Glen (1983) p213
[65] Glen (1983) p216
[66] Glen (1983) p219
[67] Glen (1983) p221

V

> Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
> Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.
> For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
> Events of Time start forth & are conceivd in such a Period
> Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery[68]

Timescale for Blake relates not only to wider humanity and its actions in history, but also more crucially to his singular vocation as prophet, and his individuality as poet. Thus he represents himself and his task, his vocation, within the figure of Los and links Los with Milton, one of his poetic *auctors*, and locates their concerted activities within an ancient bardic tradition by way of the figure of Taliesin[69]. In this way he seeks to establish that all have their antecedents in the Bible by way of the prophets and Jesus. Blake wants both lineage and authority for his poetry, and biblical precedent for his prophecy. Los descends to Blake in his garden in Felpham and they become One Man: 'Los descended to me:/And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun ... And I became One Man with him arising in my strength'[70]. Milton also descends to Blake in his garden: 'And Milton ... Descended down a Paved work of all kinds of precious stones/Out from the eastern sky; descending down into my Cottage/Garden: clothed in black, severe & silent he descended'[71]. Together as one united force, Blake, Los, and Milton, fight Satan.

Los and Blake together speak as Taliesin[72]: 'I am that Shadowy Prophet who Six Thousand Years ago/Fell from my station in the Eternal bosom. Six Thousand Years/Are finishd. I return! both Time & Space obey my will./I in Six Thousand Years walk up and down: for not one Moment/Of Time is lost, nor one Event of Space unpermanent./But all remain: every fabric of Six Thousand Years/Remains permanent'[73]. It is significant that Thomas also refers to Taliesin, establishing lineage with him to strengthen his own vocation[74]. Thomas's poem 'Taliesin 1952' mirrors the form, vocabulary, and repetitions of The Hanes Taliesin riddle[75]. Hopkins too looks backwards at the ancient Welsh bardic tradition with

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[68] Milton Book the First Plate 28 lines 44-45, 62-63; Plate 29 lines 1-3
[69] cf the Taliesin connection in Milton and The Four Zoas: Milton Book the First Plate 22 lines 15-26; cf also Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the Eighth Page 113 (second portion) lines 46-55
[70] Milton Book the First Plate 22 lines 5-12
[71] Milton Book the Second Plate 38 lines 5-8; cf also Plate 39 lines 3-8; See also **Figure 5** Milton Plate 36 Thames & Hudson (2000) p284
[72] A sixth-century poet who wrote one of the most famous supposedly ancient Welsh poems: the 'Hanes Taliesin' or 'Life of Taliesin' in which the poet mystically recounts his many previous lives from the beginning of the world.
[73] Milton Book the First Plate 22 lines 15-21
[74] 'Taliesin still, I show you a new world, risen,/Stubborn with beauty, out of the heart's need' - 'Taliesin 1952' from Selected Poems (1973)
[75] See this reproduced in Graves (1961) p81, Lady Charlotte Guest's translation.

his not inconsiderable use of *cynghanedd*, or consonant-chime[76] throughout his poetics, which he uses in order to intensify and 'charge' his poetry[77]. Through this device of *auctor*, then, there is conflation of the bardic and prophetic vocations across time, yet this connection ensures a disintegration of time itself, Blake making the point that the synchronic face of poetic prophecy may change, but its diachronic presence remains an ongoing and uninterrupted force[78]: 'The generations of men run on in the tide of Time/But leave their destind lineaments permanent for ever & ever'[79]. Blake locates his own synchronic individuation as prophet within its diachronic vocational lineage, and he stands alongside the ancient prophets who 'with one accord delegated Los/Conjuring him by the Highest that he should Watch over them/Till Jesus shall appear: & they gave their power to Los/Naming him the Spirit of Prophecy, calling him Elijah'[80]. Los walks round the walls night and day on perpetual watch as prophet 'And all that has existed in the space of six thousand years:/Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanishd, & every little act,/Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still'[81].

Blake's connection with a bardic lineage[82] bears fruit in the fourteen designs he etched for Thomas Gray's poem 'The Bard'. The figure of this bard represents patriotism and liberty in the face of political oppression, and in this sense, with his stance of radical opposition and protest, it would have resonated deeply with Blake. The conception of the bard shared by Macpherson and Gray drew on the belief that ancient poets had been intimately involved in the public affairs of their societies[83]. The same is true of Blake's Los.

Frye comments that 'The prophet can see an infinite and eternal reality'[84], and Blake achieves this by way of an over-arching vision that perceives eternity and the quotidian moment as one and the same event. Blake can easily say 'Medway mingled with Kishon: Thames recievd the heavenly Jordan/Albion gave me to the whole Earth to walk up & down; to pour/Joy upon every mountain, to teach songs to the shepherd & plowman …

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[76] See 'rash-fresh' in 'The Sea and the Skylark', also 'Trench – right … tide … ramps against', 'Left hand, off land', 'In crisps of curl', 'wild winch whirl', 'pour/And pelt', 'ring right out' etc. Gardner (1967) No 35 p68

[77] For example: 'The ear in milk, lush the sash,/And crush-silk poppies aflash,/The blood-gush blade-gash/Flame-rash rudred/Bud shelling or broad-shed' Gardner (1967) No 138 p176: 'The Woodlark'

[78] 'These are the Sons of Los, & these the Labourers of the Vintage … These are the Children of Los … Uttering prophecies & speaking instructive words to the sons/Of men: These are the Sons of Los! These the Visions of Eternity' Milton Book the First Plate 26 lines 1-12; also: 'Los with his mighty Hammer demolishes time on time/In miracles & wonders in the Four-fold Desart of Albion/Permanently Creating to be in Time Reveald & Demolishd' Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 73 lines 32-34

[79] Milton Book the First Plate 22 lines 24-25; cf also Erdman (1988) p710: letter to Flaxman, 21 September 1800; Blake also believed that one's mind and imagination were eternal, being 'above the Mortal & Perishing Nature' *ibid* p660: Annotations to Reynolds

[80] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 39 [44] lines 28-31

[81] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 13 lines 55, 59-61; See Isaiah 21:6-8; cf also Ezekiel 33:1-9, 3:16-21

[82] Discussed in Songs above, specifically: 'Introductions', 'Earth's Answer', 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' etc

[83] Jon Mee. Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. pp84-5

[84] Frye (1947) p59

With holy raptures of adoration rapd sublime in the Visions of God'[85]. He mixes the ideal with the real, the historical with the present, ancient sites with contemporary cities, spiritual vision with the harsh realities of life, and looks through these differing connected lenses to examine man's condition.

Blake's vocation and individuality as man come together within his direct personal relationship with the Divine. Blake as prophet is the medium for God's words, a mediator between God and people, a spokesman or instrument who channels messages to us for our benefit. He is, like the biblical prophets before him, simultaneously *vox populi* and *vox dei*[86]. Divine messages come to him, 'descending down the Nerves of my right arm/From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry/The Eternal Great Humanity Divine' may plant his 'Paradise'[87]. Blake as God's mouthpiece, inspired by Divine Muses, receives what he is given and passes this on, singing a bard's prophetic song at 'eternal tables' where all can sit attentive to him, the 'awful man'[88]. Blake acts as individual spokesman for the Lord through the human imagination which is the 'Divine Body of the Lord Jesus'[89] alive on earth for our 'eternal salvation'. The possibility of achieving eternal salvation exists, Blake believes, within our real lives and the real geographical locations where we live: our own personal salvation happening 'Between South Molton Street & Stratford Place: Calvarys foot'. This is ideal spiritual vision which Blake links with real human experience in order that he himself can carry out a specific vocational task: 'such are the words of man to man/In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,/To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating'[90]. Blake is engaged in a 'Mental Fight' to build Jerusalem (the ideal world) 'In Englands green & pleasant Land'[91] (the real world), for Blake knows that we create our own lives and experience here, and it is his 'wake-up' call to us: 'England! awake! awake! awake!/Jerusalem thy Sister calls!/Why wilt thou sleep the sleep of death?/And close her from thy ancient walls'[92]. Blake's vocation is aimed at waking us up so that we might look and see, live and be truly alive to the fallen reality around us and work towards transforming it. Jerusalem is at once the Kingdom of God and a real city. It could be London. The 'Mental Fight' is one that he asks of us too, for our

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[85] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 79 lines 35-44
[86] God appoints Jeremiah as 'a prophet to the nations', his representative on earth (1: 5), see also 'I am now making my words in your mouth a fire' (5: 14); yet Jeremiah also represents the people, aligning himself with their sufferings before God (4: 19-21, also 8: 18-22), cf also Isa 21: 3-4
[87] Milton Book the First Plate 2 lines 5-8
[88] Milton Book the First Plate 2 lines 22-25
[89] Milton Book the First Plate 3 lines 3-4
[90] Milton Book the Second Plate 30 lines 18-20
[91] 'Mental Fight' Milton Preface Plate 1
[92] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To the Christians'; cf also **Figure 19** Jerusalem Plate [41] 46 'Albions sleep' Thames & Hudson (2000) p343

return to Israel is a 'Return to Mental Sacrifice & War'[93]. This means we must labour to ensure moral and physical regeneration and redemption in our world. This is the only war which Blake believes is worth fighting: a war on want, on exploitation, on prejudice, on class difference, on false religion, on oppression, limitation, and obsession with materiality at the expense of recognition of spirit.

Blake speaks of his own singular vocation as bard and prophetic witness to the truth: 'Let the Bard himself witness. Where hadst thou this terrible Song/The Bard replied. I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing/According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius/Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity/To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen'[94]. Establishing himself as witness to divine truth through inspiration, himself as medium for the 'eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity', Blake commands us to hear him[95], his didactic imperative strongly uttered: 'Hear the voice of the Bard!/Who Present, Past, & Future sees,/Whose ears have heard/The Holy Word,/That walk'd among the ancient trees.//Calling the lapsed Soul'[96]. Blake gives us this imperative because he sees all things in all times and has heard, directly, the word of God which gives him his authority to speak. It is the Bard's voice that is capable of controlling events and the turning of the world because he is a 'fallen' being himself, one of us, and is able to call us as lapsed souls to become part of his task to renew the fallen light. It is Blake's vocational task to try and redeem humankind, help us to regain Eden and be spiritually and morally refreshed and rejuvenated: 'Night is worn,/And the morn/Rises'. He calls on 'Earth' to return to the Lord, to get up off the grass where she is prostrate with grief, to turn away no more towards her sin, but repent[97] and repeats this call in Jerusalem[98].

Blake aligns his vocation with that of the biblical prophets: 'The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and

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[93] Jerusalem Plate 27 'To the Jews' lines 96-7; cf Hopkins: 'But be the war within, the brand we wield/Unseen' No 73 'St Alphonsus Rodriguez' Gardner (1967) p106

[94] Milton Book the First Plate 13 lines 50-51, Plate 14 lines 1-3

[95] 'The spirit of Hebrew prophecy permeated not merely Blake's verse but even his daily life. He saw the world around him, the industrialization of England, the oppression of the poor, the ugliness and squalor of the towns, through the eyes of the biblical prophet. Himself he regarded as the bearer of the divine message, and in him the traditions of the ancient bard and the Hebrew prophet met and mingled ... Blake solemnly warns his readers to heed the divine message – the message, in fact, of the prophet-bard' Roston (1965) p160

[96] 'Introduction' to Songs of Experience

[97] He aligns himself with Jeremiah here 22:29: 'O Earth, earth, earth, hear the voice of the Lord'.

[98] 'Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!/I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine ... A black water accumulates, return Albion! return! ... Weep at thy souls disease, and the Divine Vision is darkend' Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 lines 6-21

perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all'[99]. Such a view takes us, as Frye says, back to the idea of the prophet as *vates* or seer, within a succession of ancient bards, the teacher of higher truths than reason knows[100]. In his Laocoön engraving, Blake inscribed his prime artistic tenet: 'The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art'[101]. Blake perceived the spiritual and the creative to be inextricably linked, the Bible itself being the greatest work of poetry: 'The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius'[102]. Prophetic vocation however, must speak out of singular individual experience. Blake as medium may speak out of one particular time but he locates his speech, its resonance and relevance to the present moment, within wider eternal time, and he links such archetypal *kairos* to his contemporary *chronos* of historical context, immediate environment, the wider geography of London, and the topography of England and Scotland. He is also in touch, on a different plane, with the spiritual workings of God: 'In this world we can draw no real distinction between the individual and the social aspects of any creative act, and in eternity even the appearance of a distinction vanishes. The term 'identity' expresses at once an individual and a social integration'[103]. Thus the 'identities' of all the prophet/poets here discussed, including the Hebrew Bible prophets, lose their individual, unique identities and in the form of diachronic 'mouths' become integrated into the processes of time and become a social phenomenon that is part of an ongoing organic process which changes from within, that which it attacks from without. In this way they speak to us with 'embedded' intrinsic voices within history, society, geography, the 'exterior' extrinsic spiritual and eternal truths of life. Blake's prophetic vocation fuses together these various 'identities', for God needs a man to speak to men on his behalf, and he speaks to us through his prophets.

Blake's integrated identity speaks to us about integration itself. Man's 'Four Zoas' or the differing 'living creatures' as parts which go to make up the sum of man, are in disunity, and instead of working in harmony to provide man with 'Fourfold Vision', work to divide, split and disintegrate[104]. Enion's speech declares that 'All Love is lost Terror succeeds & Hatred instead of Love/And stern demands of Right & Duty instead of Liberty'[105], for man

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[99] A Descriptive Catalogue Erdman (1988) p541
[100] Frye (1947) p169
[101] Leslie Tannenbaum. Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982. p3
[102] Tate Gallery (2000) p60; quote from All Religions Are One Principle 6
[103] Frye (1947) p249
[104] Tate Gallery (2000) p24: Blake is considering 'human development beyond selfhood, in search of ethical, social and religious goals' – 'Albion's 'divisions' [in Jerusalem] include the male Luvah and the females Jerusalem, Erin, Enitharmon and Vala. This is an allegorical presentation of inward conflict and destructive personal relationships, on the private and domestic as well as the national scene'
[105] Vala or The Four Zoas Night The First Page 4 lines 20-21

is separated within and 'a Perfect Unity Cannot Exist'. Yet this is what Blake fights *for* as he simultaneously fights *against* disintegration with his holistic all-encompassing vision. Injustice, inequality, poverty; social, political, and religious oppression can all be changed to justice, equality, freedom, dignity, the spirit of Jesus alive in the integrated Man. However, pursuing an ideal seems an impossible task, 'The actual makes the ideal look helpless and the ideal makes the actual look absurd'[106], but any 'we' that Blake uses implies that he can only attain these with our help, for at the heart of justice is the ideal of community: walking with God means walking well with one another. Blake is at pains to emphasise that the individual's actions matter, responsibility resting upon critical self-analysis and elected change[107]: 'In my Exchanges every Land/Shall walk, & mine in every Land,/Mutual shall build Jerusalem:/Both heart in heart & hand in hand'[108]. Self-awareness is the key: 'Urizen said. I have Erred & my Error remains with me'[109]. The errors of our ways remain with us even after repentance, we are never free of our deeds. This means that the 'return to Israel' is a return to mental sacrifice and war[110], for our return is to the homeland of the redeemed self, to its concomitant freedom, and incorporates a return to self-analysis, self-sacrifice, and a return to the strife within that is a war on self and on actions. Such a war requires awareness and the understanding (and regulating) of choices, deeds, responsibilities. Unless we are aware of what our actions do to others, we can do nothing else but divide and separate: 'A foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth:/That Man be separate from Man, & here I plant my seat'[111]. The key to returning to our own hearts and to a New Eden, in Blake's view, is twofold: self-annihilation combined with active altruism: 'Then Los grew furious raging: Why stand we here trembling around/Calling on God for help; and not ourselves in whom God dwells/Stretching a hand to save the falling Man'[112]. Blake can therefore exhort: 'if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself/Eternally for Man Man could not exist! for Man is Love:/As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little Death/In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood'[113]. Good deeds, kindness, openness, love, would in effect resurrect the ancient covenant with Yahweh (which was broken): 'In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self-

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[106] Frye (1947) p237

[107] This links with Hopkins' ideas of the distinction between 'elected' will and 'affected' will, the latter to be denied as an evil, natural impulse, the former to be supported and enhanced because it means directed, chosen, willpower at the service of self-denial - Blake by contrast wanted limitation disposed of and adhered to giving-in to natural impulses, especially sexual ones, believing the practice of these to be the ultimate freedom of man as against the rigidity of imposed laws from without, especially by the church.

[108] Jerusalem Plate 27 'To the Jews' lines 85-88; cf Jeremiah 31: 33 'After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people'

[109] Vala or The Four Zoas Night the Ninth Page 122 line 21

[110] Jerusalem Plate 27 lines 96-97

[111] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 28 lines 11-12

[112] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 38 [43] lines 12-14

[113] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 96 lines 25-28

Annihilation, it is the Covenant of Jehovah'[114]. The covenant with Yahweh should be the covenant we practise with each other, to ensure that 'each shall mutually/Annihilate himself for others good'[115]. In this way we will be God's people and he will be our God, and we will have a right heart within us.

Blake's prophetic vocation, reflected in Los, is 'To beat/These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death'. He acts not for himself but for Albion's sake, his vocation making him, in others' eyes, 'a horror and an astonishment'[116]. Blake's vision is that

> Mutual in one anothers love and wrath all renewing
> We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
> We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one[117],
> As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
> We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
> Giving, recieving, and forgiving each others trespasses.[118]

This ideal vision makes us all part of the Divine Family that is one body, with each of us as members. Blake hopes to highlight the individual and collective 'fall into Division' so that we might, singly and collectively, have 'Resurrection to Unity'[119]. The Book of Thel answers the conception that our brief mortality is 'without a use', that no lasting life only undermines life itself, by saying that 'every thing that lives,/Lives not alone. nor for itself'[120]. In this holistic understanding we must 'live and love' and above all, procreate, using our bodies to take part in the life and death cycles of nature, for Blake does not see us as being separate from these. Within Jerusalem Blake describes the fall of Albion (Adam) and his separation from Jesus the Divine Vision, and describes the Labours of Los (Blake, Milton, all poets) to restore and regenerate, ultimately reunite Albion with Jesus. This is the 'theme' which 'calls' Blake, the theme of his vocation which he dons like a mantle 'night after night, & ev'ry morn'. Blake believes in the perfectibility of mankind, in time: 'the time will arrive,/When all Albions injuries shall cease, and when we shall/Embrace him tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality./They have divided themselves by Wrath, they must be united by/Pity'[121]. He believes in the reality of unity, in man

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[114] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 98 line 23
[115] Milton Book the Second Plate 38 lines 35-36
[116] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 8 lines 15-18
[117] See footnotes 166 & 311 (cf p235) regarding 'circumference' and 'core'; also Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 71 lines 6-9
[118] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 34 [38] lines 16-22
[119] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the First Page 4 line 5
[120] The Book of Thel Plate 3 ll lines 22 & 26-27
[121] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 7 lines 54-58

becoming Jesus, perfectible through the passage of time: 'O holy Generation of regeneration!'[122]

Los, as a personification of vocation, Blake's protagonist, is also his *alter ego*, the one who represents Blake's tireless energy and artifice engaged in an eternal task to save temporal man:

> The Eternal Prophet heavd the dark bellows,
> And turn'd restless the tongs; and the hammer
> Incessant beat; forging chains new & new
> Numb'ring with links. hours, days & years[123]

Los's vocation is also to shine light into dark places, to expose, reveal and clarify: 'His head beamd light & in his vigorous voice was prophecy'[124]. It is in this way, carrying a solar disc, that Los enters the Door of Death for Albions sake inspired[125], to search out the 'tempters' in the 'interiors of Albions Bosom' and so confront the 'solitude and dark despair' of humanity[126]. It is in this way that Blake illuminates the darkness of the world by way of his visionary imagination; the outer 'body' falls away and the inner spirit rises. Gardner considers that Los is a representative self-portrait of Blake, wearing a wide hat and stepping across a threshold into darkness[127]. In The Song of Los, he signifies creativity and unrestrained imagination.

Blake's prophetic vocation then, is an amalgam of many things, many voices, many representations within his works. He sees his vocation as inheriting authority from lineage and validated by the voice of God. The main thrust of his vocation is to empower us to achieve the universal perception of the particular, literally to see the world in a grain of sand. To achieve a 'universal' or 'macro' vision that reveals God within the 'micro' and 'particular' is Blake's vocational hope, and it is his didactic imperative to us that we perceive correctly in order to achieve a vision of integration rather than separation. He wants us to truly understand that everything that lives is holy[128]. As Raine comments, Blake is zealous in his task because he sees God as being incarnate in every human life[129]. Were we to see as Blake sees, we might realise that there exists nothing in creation without life or outside the life of God[130].

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[122] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 7 line 65
[123] The [First] Book of Urizen Plate 10 Chapter IV (b) stanza 2
[124] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the First Page 9 line 26
[125] See **Frontispiece** 'Los As he enterd the Door of Death' Jerusalem Plate 1 (proof) Tate Gallery (2000) p248
[126] 'At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people' Zeph 1: 12
[127] S Gardner (1986) p46
[128] See Visions of the Daughters of Albion plate 8; America plate 8; Vala or The Four Zoas Night the Second, page 34, line 80
[129] Kathleen Raine. Blake and the New Age. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1979. p19
[130] Raine (1979) p29

VI

Blake's authority to speak, and the authenticity of his speech, has its roots in his certainty of living an inspired vocation and being compelled to utter by a higher power. Blake's authority to utter also rests on his belief that conscience is one of the ways of knowing God: 'the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote'[131]. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell[132] Blake recounts 'the origin of religion as the usurpation of the poets' authority by the priesthood'[133]. This usurping becomes an issue of both vision and perception, an issue which separates looking from seeing, seeing from understanding, the priesthood being the culprits who make us blind: 'a system was formed ... to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began Priesthood ... Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast'. Blake, as the ancient prophets did, through an inspired rather than a sanctioned authority, challenges the power of the Church. He attempts to snatch the myths out of the hands of the priests, the tyrants, and the bigots and return them to their rightful home, the human breast[134].

Blake's authority to do this comes from his own insighted and inspired vision, a vision which perceives a crucial difference between external appearance and internal reality: 'Truly my Satan thou art but a Dunce/And dost not know the Garment from the Man'[135]. Blake believed that all men were 'alike' with 'infinite variety' both in outward form and inward 'Poetic Genius'. This expresses the idea of *discordia concors/concordia discors*[136] which was also an issue of sight and perception for both Hopkins and Thomas. Fourfold vision[137] means the utilisation of the faculties of the whole man which are brought to bear upon sight and understanding. These visionary faculties begin in the 'gross flesh' and end in spirit, denoting a progressive width of ability to perceive: from physical, to intellectual,

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[131] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy' lines 9-10
[132] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 11
[133] Tannenbaum (1982) p110
[134] Tannenbaum (1982) p111
[135] For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise Epilogue: 'To the Accuser who is the God of This World' Complete Poems (1997) p863
[136] See discussion on Scotus: Chapter 3 p65; cf also Horace's original use: *concordia discors*: 'nature's jarring concord' Book I Epistle 12 line19: Niall Rudd. Tr. Horace: Satires and Epistles. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987. p154, inverted by Samuel Johnson to *discordia concors*, 'discord in harmony', in his 'Life of Cowley' (1779). J P Hardy. Ed. Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. p12
[137] There is much discussion among critics about this enigmatic term. Wilson (1971) p67 comments: 'Single vision is purely material perception: in twofold vision an intellectual value is added, in threefold an emotional, and in fourfold a spiritual'. Gleckner says these are: single vision: 'the imagination of the fool', 'then double vision or imaginative perception; then the creative imagination; and finally the all-inclusive Body of the Imagination, the ultimate union of creator and creature' Robert F Gleckner. The Piper & The Bard: A Study of William Blake. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959. p57. These equate to the categories: Ulro, Generation, Beulah, Eden – which Beer agrees with: John Beer. Blake's Humanism. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968. p33, but he interprets them in terms of darkness moving to light. Percival (1938) says 'Single vision is of the outward, feminine, corporeal world, and of that alone ... Single vision is window vision', 'Twofold vision brings spiritual perception into play. The object is now seen within and without', 'When the ... world and all that is therein can be seen ... as the manifestation of spirit – then the soul has arrived at threefold vision', 'In fourfold vision the eye sees as it sees in Eden. Corporeality has been utterly consumed in mental fires', this is 'visionary seeing' pp272-274

to emotional, to spiritual. In visual terms, these chart a progressive movement of depth from a single point to a three-dimensional object illustrated by the point, the line, the plane, the triangle, the cube. Fourfold vision is crucial in discerning *difference* in life - of perceiving spiritual presence in and beyond materiality, of discerning internal reality (circumcision of the heart) as opposed to exterior appearance (circumcision of the body). The latter equates to empty religious rites and observances which are an hypocrisy and mere external show[138] as against the former which represents circumspection of deed in both life and religion: 'Go to these Fiends of Righteousness/Tell them to obey their Humanities, & not pretend Holiness'[139]. Blake would like to 'overthrown their cup,/Their bread, their altar-table, their incense & their oath:/Their marriage & their baptism, their burial & consecration' for Blake's view is clear: worship of God is honouring his gifts in other men. Anyone who 'envies or calumniates' and does murder and cruelty, murders God[140]. Blake in his oppositional stance of righteous prophet is willing to be iconoclastic in the face of what he perceives to be a false and empty-hearted organised religion. True faith can and should be the practice of daily life.

Blake's authoritative sight is based on his ability to perceive with 'fourfold vision'[141], for being a prophet means that one's senses discover 'the infinite in every thing'[142]. For Blake, who saw the imagination as God-in-Man, Newton's vision by comparison was 'Single', representing Man-in-Man: 'May God us keep/From Single vision & Newtons sleep'[143]. Compare Blake's affirmation of his own 'insighted' ability: 'For double the vision my Eyes do see/And a double vision is always with me'[144]. This expansive vision is put to the service of raising other men into a perception of the infinite[145]. Blake follows in the tradition of Isaiah and Ezekiel by upholding 'the righteousness of honest indignation and the force of an imaginative faith'[146].

In such an 'imaginative faith', poetic authority is upheld by divine inspiration: 'we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius ... was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests ... and prophecying that all Gods would at

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[138] cf Yeats: 'Empty eyeballs knew/That knowledge increases unreality, that/Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show' 'The Statues' from Last Poems (1936-1939): W B Yeats. Collected Poems. London: Picador, 1990. p375
[139] Jerusalem Plate 91 lines 4-5
[140] Jerusalem Plate 91 lines 7-14
[141] 'Now I a fourfold vision see/And a fourfold vision is given to me' poems from letters: 'To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802' Complete Poems (1997) p487
[142] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy'
[143] Letter to Butts Nov 22, 1802 Erdman (1988) p722
[144] Poems from letters, 'To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802' Complete Poems (1997) p485
[145] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy' lines 21-22
[146] Wilson (1971) p59

last be proved to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius'[147]. Blake saw Poetic Genius as being 'the Holy Ghost in Man' - for him there was no other God than the God who is the 'intellectual fountain of Humanity'[148]. This belief is also expressed in All Religions Are One: the Poetic Genius is the true Man[149] and the same Poetic Genius is everywhere 'call'd the Spirit of Prophecy'[150]. The true Man is the source because he is the Poetic Genius[151]. These views conflate genius with inspiration, inspiration with both prophecy and poetry, and conflate the Holy Ghost with Man. The prophet is both source and tributary, and all are united as an authoritative force of opposition to rigid orthodoxy and limitation. Frye takes this further: 'The creative impulse in man is God in man; the work of art, or the good book, is an image of God, and to kill it is to put out the perceiving eye of God'[152].

With the Bible as paradigm, the prophets as ancestors, poets such as Chaucer and Milton as inspiring equals, Blake articulated with an authority that was also founded on belief in his own gifted power and sight. Following the example of Chaucer[153], Blake makes his own list of equals, his work 'subgit', or beholden, to the work of those who have gone before, whose 'steppes' he kisses in order to validate and 'raise' his own work: 'Los Creates/Adam Noah Abraham Moses Samuel David Ezekiel' and in parallel to these: '[Pythagoras Socrates Euripedes Virgil Dante Milton]'[154]. Ezekiel and Milton are placed as a culmination of each 'line' or lineage, Blake affirming that as prophet he inherits Ezekiel's mantle through the personifications of both Los and Rintrah, and as poet inherits a poetic lineage that stretches back through Milton to the Greeks. Thus the 'Pilgrim', (here Blake/Los) the synchronic representative of these dead heroes 'passes while the Country permanent remains/So Men pass on: but States remain permanent for ever'. Blake affirms his perception of the eternal and archetypal nature of prophecy and poetry existing through the medium of a contemporary, yet ever-changing, voice.

Blake's archetype for the prophetic pilgrim is Los the watchman[155]. Paley notes that here too is a link between ancient and modern, for Los is shown in the costume of a night-

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[147] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy'
[148] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 91 lines 9-10
[149] All Religions Are One Principle 1st
[150] All Religions Are One Principle 5
[151] All Religions Are One Principle 7th
[152] Frye (1947) p160
[153] 'But subgit be to alle poesye;/And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace/Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace' Troilus and Criseyde Book V 1790ff The Riverside Chaucer. 3rd edn. Ed: L D Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. p584
[154] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 73 lines 39-43; the square brackets denoting the 'workshop' stage of the text in manuscript
[155] 'the watchman on the tower is ... a personification of prophecy' (cf Habakkuk 2: 1) quote from Herbert Marks on 'The Twelve Prophets' Literary Guide (1997) p221; Jerusalem Plate 1 (proof) 1804-c.1807 Relief etching and white line etching printed in orange-brown ink on paper - see Frontispiece Tate Gallery (2000) p248

watchman of Blake's own time, a familiar contemporary figure with a broad-brimmed hat, a dark coat, and a lantern[156]. Compare Ezekiel 3:17 and Isaiah 21:11 who are appointed as 'watchmen' of the Lord[157]. Los walks the world, arising upon his 'Watch' and 'down from Golgonooza/Putting on his golden sandals' makes his way from land to land[158]. He works as an active presence in the world, descending from the ideal plane to work among the living[159]. Los's prophetic task of watchman is explained: 'Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision/Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions/Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves/Of despair & death, to search the tempters out, walking among/Albions rocks & precipices! caves of solitude & dark despair,/And saw every Minute Particular of Albion degraded & murdered'[160]. Through Los, Blake strives to explore our world in order to expose its workings, to challenge and change them: 'Because of the Opressors of Albion in every City & Village:/They mock at the Labourers limbs! they mock at his starvd Children!/They buy his Daughters that they may have power to sell his Sons:/They compell the Poor to live upon a crust of bread by soft mild arts:/They reduce the Man to want: then give with pomp & ceremony./The praise of Jehovah is chaunted from lips of hunger & thirst'[161]. This is Blake's version of the biblical oppression of 'the widow and the orphan in the gate', and he as watchman is equipped with light to search out man's dark interiors, both individually and societally, in order to expose and lay bare. This fulfils one of the prophetic imperatives which endows Blake with authority: 'See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant'[162]. As Paley observes, the Watchman of Israel is 'one who fearlessly speaks the truth regardless of the ingratitude and hostility of his listeners'[163].

VII

Blake's critical function as prophet is to provide a critique of society and mankind which 'searches our interiors' in order to expose and judge. Such a critical function, or prophetic critique, in turn denounces and warns. Gillham considers that what Blake offers is a

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[156] Paley (1983) p238
[157] See also Hosea 8: 7-8: 'The prophet is a sentinel for my God' & Habakkuk 2: 1: 'I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch'
[158] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 83 lines 75-77; cf Micah 1:3: 'For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth'
[159] See also Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plates 85 and 86 for 'the Song of Los, the Song that he sings on his Watch'; also Chapter 2 Plate 39 [44] where watcher and prophet are linked: 'they with one accord delegated Los/Conjuring him by the Highest that he should Watch over them/Till Jesus shall appear: & they gave their power to Los/Naming him the Spirit of Prophecy, calling him Elijah' lines 28-31
[160] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 45 [31] lines 2-7
[161] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 44 [30] lines 27-32
[162] Jeremiah 1: 9-10
[163] Paley (1983) p239

serious and responsible consideration of the multifarious ways in which human energy manifests itself, and in so doing he touches on various ideas of the nature of man - his concern is ultimately a moral one[164]. Blake's salvific vision incorporates holistic notions of wholeness and unity, and in his concept of salvation, the rise from division, the denial of self, the reachievement of imaginative vision, and the descent and resurrection of Christ are all merged[165]. Within the being of Man that is the body of Albion, Blake (through Los) finds that it is love ('Luvah') and reason ('Urizen') that are at war: 'And is this Faith? Behold the strife of Albion & Luvah/Is great in the east[166], their spears of blood rage in the eastern heaven/Urizen is the champion of Albion, they will slay my Luvah'[167]. In order to defend 'Luvah' amongst other things, Los fights back; in a rage he 'siezd his Hammer & Tongs, his iron Poker & his Bellows,/Upon the valleys of Middlesex, Shouting loud for aid Divine'[168].

In his prophetic critique of mankind, Blake is aware of evil and good co-existing as united contraries, and he is aware too of our ability to choose which deed to do, which part of ourselves to follow. These are the 'Two Contraries' or 'Qualities' which 'clothe' us: 'Good & Evil' and the evil part is called an 'Abstract' or a 'Negation' that undermines and harms, 'murders' our physical bodies and the divinity within us. This abstract is our 'Reasoning Power', an 'Abstract objecting power' that objectifies ourselves, others, life, a power that 'Negatives every thing'. It is our 'Spectre', our shadow-side[169]. It is to this abstracted and negative, cold reality in man that Blake speaks[170]. Blake uses the personification of Los to discuss this: 'Therefore Los stands in London building Golgonooza'[171], striving with Systems to deliver individuals from those Systems[172], and this is his terrible eternal labour because humanity is in a 'deadly sleep' and under the spell of its 'fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow'[173].

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[164] D G Gillham. Blake's Contrary States: The 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience' as Dramatic Poems. London: Cambridge University Press, 1966. p5
[165] Gleckner (1959) p42
[166] 'East' is the *core* of the circle, Ulro, Ur + low = the world of pure materialism and delusion (the real 'fallen' world), the basest condition to which man can sink = *contraction* (by contrast, *circumference* of circle is Eden, in the west, the widest *expansion* man can achieve); see Complete Poems (1997) notes p1001; cf Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 69 lines 40-44; cf also Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 29 [33] lines 19-20
[167] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 45 [31] lines 55-57
[168] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 46 [32] lines 8-10
[169] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 10 lines 7-16; Golgonooza being the City of Art in the midst of the fallen material world
[170] Thomas, too, with his criticism of science and technology, conceived in ration and promulgated without heart, echoes Blake in condemning our 'Abstract reasoning power', that he too sees as our shadow-side.
[171] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 10 line 17
[172] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 11 line 5
[173] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 15 lines 6-10

What we must do to fight abstraction and negation, to counteract our natural Spectre, is to labour to build a 'building of pity and compassion'[174] that will be built with pity, affection, love & kindness, merciful hands, forgiveness, honesty, well contrived words, humility, devotion and thanksgiving. This is the critical function of the prophet: to point up the problems and posit solutions, to bring us closer in brotherhood and closer to God by teaching us to amend our behaviour, change our 'selving'. Blake gives us a didactic imperative that says we should be active in our orientation. Even although we are lost in the darkness of Ulro, 'the land of death eternal; a Land/Of pain and misery and despair and ever brooding melancholy'[175], we can yet work to bring ourselves back up towards the light, for 'to Labour in Knowledge, is to Build up Jerusalem'[176].

Blake tells us that through self-examination and re-orientation we must 'cleanse the Face' of our spirits. We can do this by rejecting innate selfishness and self-absorption, our 'Selfhoods' which 'must be put off & annihilated away'. Blake sees 'A World in which Man is by his Nature the Enemy of Man,/In pride of Selfhood'[177]. Reason (Urizen) must be vanquished by Luvah (Los) because Urizen undermines the way of spirit and heart which leads to empathy, sympathy and compassion for our fellow man which in turn leads to altruistic acts and a realisation of community and communal life. If we kill the self, the inherent selfishness and self-absorption around which we revolve, we can be *imitatio Christi* and act by bathing in the 'Waters of Life' and washing off the 'Not Human'[178]. All 'selfhood' to Blake is perceived as Satanic. The key moral statement of the poem Milton bears this out: 'I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!/He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from my Hells/To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death'[179]. This must be a death of self in order that the 'other' can live and flourish - it is the death of an inward-looking aspect that resurrects a life of outward-facing vision which locates the self within a wider context of community and brotherhood.

This is Blake's holistic vision[180]. Private persons who consider themselves as self-sufficient units rather than as members of a Universal Man or Divine Body, are 'Blasphemous Selfhoods'. Blake believed that Jesus's divinity consisted in *casting off* his selfhood, not in lacking it[181]. He believed that all things are interlinked: 'not one sparrow

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[174] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 12 lines 29ff
[175] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 13 lines 30-31
[176] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To The Christians' lines 40-41
[177] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 38[43] lines 52-53
[178] Milton Book the Second Plate 40 lines 29-37; cf Plate 41 lines 1-8
[179] Milton Book the First Plate 14 lines 30-32
[180] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 90 lines 28-37
[181] Complete Poems (1997) notes p1032

can suffer, & the whole Universe not suffer also[182]. Los is Blake's champion in furthering this prophetic and visionary critique of humanity: 'Los cried in the Valleys of Middlesex in the Spirit of Prophecy'[183]. Blake also has Milton speak on his behalf: 'I come to Self Annihilation/Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually/Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee'[184]. In every mutual land, humanity can 'build Jerusalem:/Both heart in heart & hand in hand'[185]. In so doing, 'Jesus will appear; so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole/Must see it in its Minute Particulars'[186]. This famous phrase of Blake's relates to the apperception of detail, of seeing the whole not only as the sum of its parts, but also and more crucially, paying careful attention to those minute parts of life which go to make up the larger whole, for it is upon them that the whole depends: 'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every/Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus'[187]. Paying attention to the 'Minute Particulars' is therefore paying attention to a single human being for 'every Particular is a Man'.

Los's furnace is the energy source for the psychic transformation upon which his whole enterprise depends[188], and Los's metalworking symbolises the creative process itself[189]. Los the archetypal blacksmith carries out his creative metallurgy in order to bend and shape humanity[190] to ensure 'Jerusalem in every Man/A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness Male & Female Clothings./And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion'[191]. Los fights Urizen, and for Blake the latter's personification of ration, reason, ratio, means limitation and a downward-looking material man-centred vision which defines and delineates[192]. Such a view imprisons the mind, rendering it unable to hear, see, perceive differently, bound by myopia and rigidity. The mind then becomes its own hell of revolving thought with no relief, which provides only stagnant fixity and

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[182] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 25 line 8
[183] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 90 line 39
[184] Milton Book the Second Plate 38 lines 34-36
[185] Jerusalem Plate 27 'To the Jews' lines 85-88
[186] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 91 lines 20-21
[187] *ibid* lines 29-30
[188] Paley (1983) p238; cf also **Figure 19** Jerusalem Plate [41] 46 'Albions sleep' Thames & Hudson (2000) p343 where Los's furnaces (represented by the engulfing flames) are invoked to become the dynamo for the forward momentum of the chariot which will wake-up an apathetic Albion,
[189] Paley (1983) p242
[190] Paley (1983) p243
[191] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 54 lines 3-5
[192] See **Figure 6** The [First] Book of Urizen Plate 17[15] "The death-image of Urizen' Thames & Hudson (2000) p217. Urizen is pictured as a kneeling, non-moving figure of a man looking downward, holding his hands to his ears. Flames emanate from the head and girdle the body, creating an angry, spinning world connoting chaos, pain, cruelty. The man cannot escape from the binding, and seems to hear uncontrollable voices in his head which assail him. The world feeds on his reason, the harsh flames of which keep it spinning and alive. The energy movement is downward toward materiality and the boundaries of the corporeal, the man's face hidden in agony and shame. Blake seeks to show that it is reason which binds, undoes our humanity and robs us of our spirituality. The sun is not a nurturing entity giving off heat and light, but is rather one of anger and power which seems to hold the kneeling figure in its grip in a kind of spinning trance. The flames are destructive and out of control, the figure appears to create the dangerous sun by which he is bound, with the downward flames of material energy emanating from his mind.

stasis[193]. Los, by contrast, and in opposition, represents divine imagination, freedom, outward and upward-looking vision incorporating vigorous movement and energy, and a width of perception which comprises an active spiritual orientation towards the immanence of deity[194]. 'The Melencolia' [by Dűrer] hung near Blake's engraving bench. This is a pictorial representation of limitation and its effect on the human psyche: 'if the imagination is hemmed in by rules which are the sole guide, physical and mental inaction along with hopelessness set in'[195]. Blake's prophetic critique of humanity has the purpose of fighting against reason, which he sees as a cold and mathemathical perception admitting of delineation, rules, authority, all of which repress the imagination, the spirit, eyes and soul: 'Entering into the Reasoning Power, forsaking Imagination/They became Spectres'[196]. Using only reason as a *modus operandi* human beings become shadows of themselves, working in darkness, not in light, for 'The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated/From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio/Of the Things of Memory, It thence frames Laws & Moralities/To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars'. This is a crucial expression of Blake's polarisation of Urizen against Los, the conflict of oppositics without which there is no progression.

Blake's Songs elucidate the contrary states of the human soul: 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence'[197]. The poems in Innocence express themes of faith and acceptance and adopt a pastoral tone. Those in Experience, by contrast, convey disillusionment and anger and employ a strident bardic voice. Many poems in the two books bear the same or parallel titles in order to tie the books together by providing internal coherence across division[198]. Hirsch elucidates the distinction between the two hinged 'diptych' collections, believing that Innocence was deliberately composed to represent a state of the soul which is inadequate by itself and requires for completion a representation of the contrary state,

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[193] cf the contrary and 'healthy' vision to the above: of a kneeling man on an altar before Deity, in the Frontispiece or Plate 1 of The Song of Los (1795), Los signifying the potential creativity of the unrestrained imagination, where the revolving energy and light, infused with 'vegetable' matter, beams down on the figure which kneels quietly in obeisance and respect, voluntarily, before God and his Laws, by which he is being spiritually 'fed' – note the difference in colour here: green, blue, gold and white, as opposed to a fiery and angry red.

[194] See **Figure 7** Jerusalem Plate 97 'Los with the Sun' Thames & Hudson (2000) p394: Los appears as 'an Apollonian figure, naked and in the motions of some enraptured dance, his left hand resting on a radiant sun whose rays banish the moon and stars [and darkness] from the night sky' Tate Gallery (2000) p292 – the figure looks upward and outward into infinite space, his hand raised in both salute and protection for his eyes, and like the figure of Los the Watchman entering the Door of Death, he holds the solar disk in his hand; in both plates he both uses and controls it, it is under his jurisdiction, but it gives off positive, powerful light which enlightens, enlivens and elucidates, is not a repressive force.

[195] Tate Gallery (2000) pp168-9; cf **Figure 8** The [First] Book of Urizen Title Page Plate 1 Thames & Hudson (2000) p203 - this is a portrayal of physical and mental inaction, man grows old and static, physically debilitated, when bound by his own brass book of laws.

[196] Jerusalem Plate 74 lines 7-13

[197] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 3 lines 7-9

[198] Tate Gallery (2000) p262; cf 'The Chimney Sweeper'; 'Nurse's Song'; 'Holy Thursday'; 'The Little Boy Lost'/ 'The Little Girl Lost'; 'Infant Joy'/ 'Infant Sorrow'; 'The Lamb'/ 'The Tyger'; 'The Blossom'/ 'The Sick Rose'; 'The Divine Image'/ 'The Human Abstract'

Experience[199]. The message is that no human being can retain innocence within this human world, because to be human requires a moral engagement with that world, and moral engagement in turn relies upon the accumulation of experience[200]. This means that Innocence is not a mere state of illusion on the pathway to truth but a necessary contrary to Experience[201]. Crehan conceives that the Songs of Innocence express relatedness, caring, interdependence and responsiveness, indicative of an organic kinship-bound community[202]. Gardner agrees that the fulfilment of Innocence is dependent on a natural and social sense of kin[203]. Speaking of 'The Ecchoing Green' in particular, but relating to the Songs in general, Gardner asserts that maternal care and the concept of the family are necessary for a sense of community. In contrast, Experience distorts the natural and social nurture that can be lost in the gain of wealth[204]. The contraries expressed in the Songs effectively illustrate Blake's vision of the human predicament[205].

Blake summarises the contrary 'diptychs' as Innocence beginning in 'Infancy, fearless, lustful, happy! nestling for delight/In laps of pleasure; Innocence! honest, open, seeking/The vigorous joys of morning light; open to virgin bliss'[206]. This beginning moves towards an older, wiser, and more disillusioned state: 'Wherefore hast thou shut me into the winter of human life/And clos'd up the sweet regions of youth and virgin innocence'[207]. Blake knows that Experience is dearly bought: 'What is the price of Experience do men buy it for a song/Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price/Of all that a man hath his house his wife his children/Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy/And in the witherd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain'[208]. For Blake it is not merely poverty that appals, but the lack of any love or genuine concern for one's fellow man[209]. He harbours no illusions about the circumference and core of human existence, for the Songs of Experience satirise the state of innocence by showing us the butcher's knife that awaits the unconscious lamb. Conversely the Songs of Innocence satirise the state of experience, as the contrast which they present to it makes its hypocrisies more obviously shameful[210]. The evil which Blake seeks to present in his

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[199] E D Hirsch Jr. Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1964. p14
[200] Hirsch (1964) pp18-19
[201] Hirsch (1964) p103
[202] Stewart Crehan. Blake in Context. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1984. p94
[203] S Gardner (1986) Introduction pxviii
[204] S Gardner (1986) p47
[205] Harold Pagliaro. Selfhood and Redemption in Blake's *Songs*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987. p14
[206] Visions of the Daughters of Albion Plate 6 lines 4-6
[207] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 20 lines 5-6
[208] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the Second Page 35 lines 11-15
[209] Crehan (1984) p109
[210] Frye (1947) p237

Songs is an old evil with a new face, the renewal of an old dispensation, that of the callous human manipulation of bodies and souls[211].

This movement towards a contrary state is illustrated most clearly by Blake's title pages to the Songs. In the Title Page to Innocence[212] a brother and sister sit listening to a parent reading to them, as they bend over a large book which she has on her knees. This is a vision of early learning and human connection, a maternal scene which takes place out of doors. By contrast, the Title Page to Experience[213] sees a move to the interior of a house with a large and solid-looking wooden enclosing structure in the background (as part of a wall, or perhaps a piece of furniture) next to a bed over which two adults weep as they look downward at their dead parents. The connection has been severed and the mature children are left alone. Here is pictured the pain of adulthood, the understanding of experience, lost childhood represented by their young and innocent selves dancing above their heads. Blake has shown a progression and movement from outdoors to indoors, expanse to enclosure, an Edenic to a man-made environment, from nature to manufacture and the surroundings which man creates for himself. Life has become an imprisoning thing. Blake is saying that maturity, sorrow, knowledge, all gained through experience, can imprison us, and the heedless freedom we knew in our youth cannot be recaptured[214].

The plate 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' which closes Experience[215] in similar fashion moves the Bardic figure onwards in time and space from an unborn innocence[216] to a late, lived maturity where he is grounded within community and is no longer alone. In this plate is displayed a triumphant earthly vision of dawn and renewed hope in the colours of sunrise, a mature, white-robed Bard plays his harp and is listened to by men, women, and children who hear and understand[217]. There is an imperative to us: 'come hither:/And see the opening morn,/Image of truth new born/Doubt is fled & clouds of reason'. A resolution

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[211] S Gardner (1986) p81

[212] See **Figure 9** Songs of Innocence Title Page Thames & Hudson (2000) p45

[213] See **Figure 10** Songs of Experience Title Page Tate Gallery (2000) p119

[214] cf Thomas The Echoes Return Slow (1988) 'Years are miles' p71 where he gives us a comparison between the vision of children and the vision of an old man as he returns to a place of his youth and knows the difference in his own perception through the grown depth and breadth of his mind, that was then, in youth, shallow and limited – this poem describes the parabolic growth from youth to maturity and innocence to experience.

[215] See **Figure 11** Songs of Experience 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' Plate 54 Thames & Hudson (2000) p 96 - the Bard, now ancient, is come down to earth, grounded and connected directly with humanity, his speech immediate. The youth of delight is to 'come hither' where the Bard exactly is, in order that he might be led in the correct path and not fall into error or folly.

[216] cf **Figure 12** Songs of Experience 'Introduction' Plate 30 Thames & Hudson (2000) p72 - which in contrast shows a young naked man lying on a robe in a cloud surrounded by the stars, with a corona of light. Here the young bard is a heavenly figure, speaking downward towards earth and calling her, but not yet there. The poem is correspondingly abstract, with a wide vista that takes in the entire earth, past, present and future, Eden, the soul, the stars, the sun, all from a heavenly, stellar perspective; cf: 'The Coming' from H'm (1972): R S Thomas Collected (1993) p234

[217] See **Figure 11** Songs of Experience 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' Plate 54 Thames & Hudson (2000) p96; cf Plate 15 of Milton which shows the Bard leading a company of musicians who are dancing and playing – compare the correlation between this visual image and the description in I Samuel 10: 5-11 of the company of prophets who come down the mountain-side singing and playing instruments, and infect Saul with ecstatic prophetic frenzy.

has been reached, a didactic synthesis of both Innocence and Experience symbolised by wisdom still playing a new and fresh tune of hope, love, and freedom, to the youthful circle around him.

Blake's critique of humanity progressed through his critical function as prophet presents two opposing principles: one of the Lamb, representing softness, innocence, vulnerability, youth, joy, benevolence; and the other of the Tyger, representing ferocity, instinct, the hunter principle, ruthlessness, selfishness. These two 'faces' or opposing principles also encapsulate for Blake the twin 'Janus' faces of God: Christ as shepherd, loving kindness, sacrifice; and Yahweh as fierce judgement, purifying wrath, and vengeance. Blake focuses on children in the Songs because they are immediately representative of the weakest within our society, the easiest prey, the lambs. Thus, 'The Little Boy Lost', 'The Little Boy Found', their counterparts 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found' followed by 'A Little Boy Lost' (and not found) and 'A Little Girl Lost' (and not found) remind us of the requirement on adults to nurture and keep safe their offspring, with an emphasis on the vulnerability and innocence of children. Instead of progressing towards an idealistic and optimistic resolution, Blake delivers the horrible truth of what really is. Blake ends the sequence with two presentations of children who remain unsaved: the little boy with no protector is bound and tortured to death by the bigotry and hypocrisy of a religion that is supposed to succour the poor and the vulnerable. Here Blake makes his protest against organised religion, his view of an institutional church that, far from alleviating suffering, promotes it by way of condoning oppression and inequality and remaining barbaric in its rigid judgementalism. The little girl is similarly lost, but in her case loses her virginity and becomes sexually aware and experienced, with the potential of being exploited and abused. Her transition from childhood to adulthood will be condemned by her father who is in turn representative of another institution, the family, with its potentially oppressive and rigid morality. In these poems Blake posits the contraries of faithfulness and love *versus* cruelty and exploitation, the contrary principles of 'tyger' and 'lamb'.

In the 'twin' poems, 'The Divine Image' and 'The Human Abstract', Blake widens this discussion into a more philosophical field, moving away from direct experience towards attitudes and perceptions. 'The Divine Image' perceives that humanity, even if divided into separate nations and religions, is really one[218]. Blake emphasises this by expressing that all of us, in spite of religion, caste, creed, or social status, are 'the human form' and as long as we have 'Mercy, Love & Pity' within us, we are in touch with God whatever we conceive

[218] Crehan (1984) p99; cf Thomas: 'Listen, listen, I am a man like you' 'The Hill Farmer Speaks' in An Acre of Land (1952)

him to be. He shows that being kind to one another promotes peace and harmony, and in a spirit of kinship and community, is walking with God:

> For Mercy has a human heart
> Pity, a human face:
> And Love, the human form divine,
> And Peace, the human dress.

Compare this with its antithesis, equally true, the polarity of opposition or contrary maintaining balance, expressed in a rejected poem from Experience:

> Cruelty has a Human Heart,
> And Jealousy a Human Face;
> Terror the Human Form Divine,
> And Secrecy the Human Dress.

These oppositions articulate the dichotomy inherent in human experience, and posit the choices we must make in our progressive 'selving'. These are the two contrary states of the human soul and summarise Blake's critique of humanity: 'Pity would be no more,/If we did not make somebody Poor'. What we support unthinkingly has a real effect on the lives of individuals, for all evil 'grows … in the Human Brain'.

Blake fulfils his critical function as prophet within the poem 'London' where urban experience is distilled into a poem that provides a critical view of a whole society[219]. Blake's personal testimony to immediacy of experience, 'I wander … I meet … I hear', challenges us with its social criticism directed at accepted and acceptable institutions. It implicitly advocates political and social revolution[220]. Blake blames the 'mind-forged manacles' for being the cause of social injustice and of individual spiritual disease[221]. The word 'charter'd' focuses on one of Blake's primary concerns: that of the deliberately limited and confined 'Urizenic' downward and earthward gaze that represents the 'single vision' of materialism and restricting perception that can admit nothing of the spirit or the imagination. 'London' is a poem of perception, and is a personal testimony that attempts to 'rouze the faculties to act' by causing outrage and thereby instigating change through a distaste for what is. He strives to encourage personal and institutional responsibility to fight against 'ban' and narrow-mindedness, against opinion and judgement that would cause harm to another through either ignorance or deliberate oppression. Blake uses what he sees and translates this into a moral didacticism.

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[219] Crehan (1984) p72
[220] Hirsch (1964) p94
[221] Hirsch (1964) p94

Blake's condemnation of repressive institutions continues with his prophetic denunciation of the Church as a force for oppression and misplaced (hypocritical) zeal. In this respect, his 'poetry of protest' aligns itself with the biblical prophets' consistent opposition to the hollow devices of organised religion. Crehan comments, with respect to 'The Garden of Love' in Experience, that 'love has been curbed and blighted by an interfering priesthood, who bring only guilt, penance and joylessness'[222]. Blake's view of the Priesthood: 'And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,/And binding with briars my joys & desires', with its concomitant tenet of 'Thou shalt not. writ over the door' echoes Thomas's view of Protestantism as 'the adroit castrator of art'. Both poet/prophets are citing the physical oppression and the mental imprisonment which institutional religion brings ('As the catterpiller chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys'[223]). Real events are reflected in Blake's poetic moral didacticism. A year before he issued Songs of Experience a chapel was built on the green in South Lambeth where the children played[224], and only those who could afford to do so could use it[225]. In the Lambeth parish ledger for February 1793 there are accounts of a chapel being built on the village green that, by covenant, was exclusive to those who could afford fifty guineas to pay for a pew[226].

Accordingly, Blake made decisions within his own life to cope with and challenge what he saw as the oppressive dictates of organised institutions. William and Catherine signed the Minute Book of the General Conference of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church in April 1789. They never joined the Church but in so signing they were none the less acknowledging its guiding principles which included a conscious rejection of the 'Old' Protestant and Catholic Churches with their 'destructive faith'. They were rejecting organized religion in favour of a broader vision[227]. In visual terms, Blake registers such a protest in his colour-printed relief etching of 'God Judging Adam' (1795)[228]. Here he illustrates laws having been laid down with power, and disobeyed, Adam having eaten the forbidden fruit from which fault all other evils arose. This illustration of oppression and judgement is countered by an opposite contrary, that of 'Albion Rose'[229] (also named 'Glad Day'). The former Lambeth print shows a static Adam, head and body bowed before God, a figure of weighted shame and contrition. The latter print portrays Adam/Albion dancing

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[222] Crehan (1984) p109
[223] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 9 lines 17-18
[224] S Gardner (1986) p139
[225] S Gardner *ibid*
[226] Tate Gallery (2000) p145
[227] Tate Gallery (2000) p186
[228] See **Figure 13** 'God Judging Adam' Tate Gallery (2000) p203 - one of the twelve large colour 'Lambeth' prints which Blake executed between 1795 and 1805
[229] See **Figure 14** 'Albion Rose' Tate Gallery (2000) p243

with joy in the sunrise, fed from and linked to 'vegetable' nature but partaking of the light and joy of divinity which infuses and inspires mortality in body and mind. This is the 'fourfold' man fully liberated with all faculties working in harmony[230]. Note the difference in conception too, the former dark, sombre, grey yet fiery, the picture heavily outlined with detail, the two figures fixed and unmoving; the latter a diffuse explosion of rose, gold, and blue, of expressive energy and outward movement, the single body extended and stepping.

Blake perceives Heaven and Hell as being an earthly marriage of contrary energies co-existing in polarity yet comprising one entity. Hell for Blake is the source of energy and delight, heaven the seat of soulless lawgiving[231]. All of Blake's illustrations of static downward-gazing figures who delineate and circumscribe the world with compasses in imitation of an 'architect-God'[232] elucidate his idea of 'ratio' and the self-limiting perception which he discusses in There is No Natural Religion. He sees man's desires as being limited by his perceptions, for none can desire what he has not perceived[233]. More crucially with such illustrations, Blake seeks to show that, 'He who sees the infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only'[234]. True understanding, in Blake's eyes, comes only through vision and imagination[235].

Mankind's 'sin' according to Blake is the elevation of the self at the expense of God. All of Blake's visual renderings of figures using compasses symbolise the limiting of creation

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[230] Tate Gallery (2000) p242-3

[231] Vaughan (1999) p34

[232] See especially **Figure 15** 'The Ancient of Days' Frontispiece to Europe A Prophecy Thames & Hudson (2000) p174; however Blake's use of compasses is also masonic, with all of the integrated iconography and symbolism that relate to the ritual and craft of freemasonry; note that Isaac Newton 1691-1727 [cf **Figure 16** 'Newton' Tate Gallery (2000) p213] was listed as a Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion Order. His title was 'Nautonnier' meaning 'navigator' or 'helmsman'.

[233] There Is No Natural Religion [a] Plate V

[234] There Is No Natural Religion [b] Plate 'Application'; see also all other symbolic incidences of ratio and limitation illustrated by circumscribing compasses representing Urizen's rule of reason, and metaphoric of mental imprisonment: Blake's Illustrations to Edward Young's Night-Thoughts: Night VIII portrays a seated man with a pair of compasses indicating to a frowning child a triangle, with the corresponding words (lines 258-9): 'Ah! What avails his Innocence? The Task/Injoin'd, must discipline his early Pow'rs'. **In** Jerusalem Plate 100 **Figure** 17 Thames & Hudson (2000) p397: 'Los, his Spectre and Enitharmon before a Druid Temple' portrays giant chains/stones and giant compasses; Los and Enitharmon are engaged in the task of moving time onward within eternity, symbolised by the cyclic movement and seasons of sun, moon and stars, the threads of which Enitharmon weaves. The central figure, Los's Spectre, Man himself with his 'reasoning' power, can only use man-made objects to delineate (and reduce) his experience of the world. The figure of Urizen also personifies the making of laws that limit energy and repress the imagination, The [First] Book of Urizen expresses this: 'He form'd a line & a plummet/To divide the Abyss beneath./He form'd a dividing rule:/He formed scales to weigh;/He formed massy weights;/He formed a brazen quadrant;/He formed golden compasses/And began to explore the Abyss' Chapter VII stanzas 7 & 8. This is exploration of environment and attempt to rule, measure and divide, in order to comprehend; see also Vala, or The Four Zoas Night The Sixth Page 73 lines 16-20. Blake's Lambeth print 'Newton' **[Figure 16]** illustrates the scientist with his compasses, portraying him as a rationalist, preoccupied with his calculations. Note the curtailed and focussed straight line of Newton's gaze, the careful delineation drawn out on parchment, and the circumscribing (and limiting) quality of the triangle that admits of nothing that is not within its scope. The physical body cramped and in stasis points downward toward materiality. The print shows an underwater scene, Blake portraying the material through colour, darkness and oppressive weight; Newton himself seems to 'grow' out of the rock, as many of Blake's figures do: "Times on times he divided, & measur'd/Space by space in his ninefold darkness/Unseen, unknown!' The [First] Book of Urizen Plate 3 Chapter 1 lines 8-10. Blake, through these different portrayals of ratio, illustrates rational limitation and dissection, leading to fragmentation: seeing the parts only blinds you to the whole. Mental darkness for Blake comes from a deliberately myopic, curtailed and 'unseeing' vision.

[235] Vaughan (1999) p40

by reason without imagination, and show man's propensity to see portion as against infinity, perceiving the 'Devouring' (and limiting) in preference to the 'Prolific' (and expansive). Blake illustrates man's leaning towards 'reason' as a crucial tool of comprehension, a method which deliberately limits the illimitable expanse of reality into compartments:

> Some fix'd the anvil, some the loom erected, some the plow
> And harrow formd & framd the harness of silver & ivory
> The golden compasses, the quadrant & the rule & balance.[236]

Blake's critique is prophetic of the rising industrialisation of his time, the application of deliberate science and technology to the human realm. The industrial revolution was to alter irrevocably man's relationship with himself and his environment, and Blake sees his age begin an ultimately destructive relationship with the machine when man sets 'a compass upon the face of the depth'[237]. Blake's critical function conceives of reason, rationality and functionalism ('ratio') as being directly opposed to humanity, imagination and spirit. Ratio is 'A dark and unknown night, indefinite, unmeasurable, without end./Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination/(Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus. blessed for ever)'[238].

Blake exhorts us, as Thomas does, to move from one position to another through self-analysis, and he charts this movement within his poetic critique of man: 'The psychological movement from self to loss of temporal self, and from individual to universal being'[239]. This journey necessitates the 'opening of the single mind into some aspect of the manifold mind'[240], and becomes in effect a 'transforming' vision that has the power to 'transfigure' the commonplace and re-orientate us within our exterior and interior worlds. As Glen rightly states, Blake's vision in the Songs in particular depends 'not on the denial of social realities ... but on a careful poetic exploration of the interpenetration between ideal values and human experience within an actual society'[241]. This 'interpenetration' is illustrated by Blake's vision of 'contraries' without which no progression is possible, and the existence of these contraries and their state of endless strife symbolise the 'tension between quotidian reality and transcendent vision'[242].

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[236] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night The Second Page 24 lines 10-15
[237] Proverbs 7:27
[238] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 5 lines 57-59
[239] Pagliaro (1987) p114
[240] Pagliaro (1987) p114
[241] Glen (1983) p111
[242] Glen (1983) p144

VIII

All of Blake's perspectives take place within a real contextual environment, a forum and arena which Blake perceives as the workplace of the spirit: London and England, located specifically within eighteenth century society. Looking at the Songs alone, we can see that Blake worked within and against a context of poverty in London, contemporary oppression of the poor by institutions like the Church and State, and he saw with his own eyes inequality in action and the suffering of individuals. As Erdman comments, Blake takes us into the dismal London streets, into the schoolroom and the chapel to see the real effects of Empire on the human 'flowers' of London town[243]. Blake is against the inequality 'that supports pity and mercy', and against the belief that society cannot exist without a class of poor. He emphatically protests against the prevailing notion that it is society's 'duty to teach the poor that their sufferings are necessary and natural and not to be remedied by laws or constitutional changes'[244]. He strongly believed that we can organise ourselves better for the benefit of all and not merely the few.

As Crehan notes, the late eighteenth century was a period in which the condition of children began to arouse the religious and moral concern of the enlightened middle classes[245]. Whilst the plight of the chimney sweeps, the increase in child labour and the unscrupulous exploitation of charity-school children may have aroused the indignation of reformers and philanthropists, their concern was for something called 'society', rather than for the children themselves[246]. This contextual 'societal' issue came close to Blake's own home area - the aspects of child care with which he was familiar were the London day charity schools, the newly established school for the children from St James's workhouse near Broad Street, and the arrangements for the nursing of destitute infants at Wimbledon[247]. Blake was also familiar with the new school at King Street, near St James's, a property bought and refurbished for the boarding and education of children 'from the Workhouse or from the Nurses in the Country'[248].

Regarding Lambeth itself, and specifically No 13 Hercules Buildings where Blake lived from 1790 – 1800, the Westminster Lying-in Hospital, the Asylum for Orphan Girls, the workhouse and charity schools, were all within a short distance[249]. These institutions had

[243] David V Erdman. Blake: Prophet Against Empire. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969. p272
[244] For discussion of this see Erdman (1969) pp273-4
[245] Crehan (1984) p85
[246] Crehan (1984) p85
[247] S Gardner (1986) p6
[248] S Gardner (1986) p8
[249] Tate Gallery (2000) p144

their own 'rules' about who was deserving of their patronage and who not. The Asylum admitted no 'negro' or 'mulatto' child, also no child who was diseased, deformed or infirm. In addition to these institutions, there were local factories and a warren of unlit lanes and alleyways running down to the river where workers and their families were crowded into single rooms. These conditions led to poverty, disease, and overcrowding. In the Lambeth parish ledger for February 1793 there are accounts of a dead child found in Lambeth marsh which might relate to Blake's depiction of a dead baby on Plate 33: 'Holy Thursday' in Experience[250]. Crehan asserts that poetry and visual art have always had a social context and a social function; it is this larger context that gives any creative act shape and meaning - it is not created *ex nihilo*[251]. Blake more than most was aware that the cost of eighteenth-century improvement in mass urban terms was increased poverty and social misery. The gaols, workhouses and madhouses were overflowing, placing growing burdens on parish authorities and bringing urgent calls for institutional reform[252]. Blake was overt in his portrayal of contextual divided society with a more powerful side perpetually preying on the weaker. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell he conceives of a society split into two classes, the Prolific and the Devouring, these being synonyms for the productive classes (mainly labouring) and the consuming classes (mainly the rich).

Outwith the immediate societal issues on Blake's doorstep, existed the wider context or arena of the world stage. Here prevailed an atmosphere of revolution and counter-revolution, of riots, armed conspiracies, plots, informers and spies, generated by new conflict as the French revolutionary armies overturned monarchical systems of government. Here was a new historical era of social crisis and class struggle out of which the modern working class was born. Blake's life and art were deeply affected by these changes[253], as he lived through sixty-nine years of wars and revolutions, political, industrial, and intellectual[254]. Such 'world stage' contextual events are translated by Blake into a mix of the real and the archetypal which characterises Jerusalem, 'the poem of the city'[255]. It is also the poem of the country however, (and by implication the world) with its archetypal figures or giant forms labouring eternally in real places. Blake also makes correspondences between Britain and the 12 tribes of Israel (Ch 1 Plate 16 lines 28-60) where he presents a conflation of time, ancient history living-on within the quotidian, and eternal archetypal forces labouring within *chronos* or human clock time, particularly Rintrah the son of Los, a

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[250] Tate Gallery (2000) p145
[251] Crehan (1984) p1
[252] Crehan (1984) p59
[253] Crehan (1984) p60
[254] Erdman (1969) p3
[255] Nicholas M Williams. Ideology and Utopia In The Poetry of William Blake. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p170

prophetic figure of upheaval and change. Rintrah and Los are personifications of Blake's prophetic Wrath or Indignation (*ibid* lines 11-15) where heaven and earth exist by 'Londons River'. Blake presents real places linked with mythical/mystical planes, eternal energy situated and active within the temporal quotidian. Blake seeks to show us that behind the grand, historical movements of wars and revolutions, the upheavals of human interaction at a country and state level, lies a different reality, that of the archetypal and eternal force that drives such movements like an unseen dynamo: 'All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of/Los's Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works'[256].

Blake perceives grand historical wars and revolutions as being one of the factors, within human experience and our progression towards maturity as a race, which exists in order to deliver us from ourselves and our 'Fallen' state. He envisages, 'A World where Man is by Nature the enemy of Man/Because the Evil is Created into a State, that Men/May be deliverd time after time evermore. Amen'[257]. This perception views human forward momentum into maturity as an ongoing process of Fall and Redemption, with the kingdom of God at hand. Hell is with us now, in the present, and we fight on two planes, the real and temporal as well as the ideal and eternal: 'Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary'[258]. As Percival rightly states, Blake views Creation, Redemption, and Judgment as continuous and simultaneous processes. These processes comprise the ongoing and cyclic 'creation' of error, the release of man from the power of error, and the destruction of error in mental fires[259]. For Blake this eternal effort is going on now, within individuals and within States, carried out in a real time/place continuum: 'Here on the banks of the Thames, Los builded Golgonooza,/Outside of the Gates of the Human Heart, beneath Beulah/In the midst of the rocks of the Altars of Albion. In fears/He builded it, in rage & in fury. It is the Spiritual Fourfold/London: continually building & continually decaying desolate:/In eternal labours'[260].

Blake's keen awareness of the social and political troubles of his age is reflected in Jerusalem. This can be read in personal terms, as the progress of a soul towards enlightenment, but the poem also has a public side and addresses a contemporary situation: that of Britain being at war with France and expanding in terms of industrial strength,

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[256] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 16 lines 61-62
[257] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 49 lines 69-71
[258] Jerusalem Plate 52 'To the Deists' lines 10-13
[259] Percival (1938) p223
[260] Jerusalem Plate 53 Chapter 3 lines 15-20

wealth and imperial power[261]. Blake also saw London develop from a lively commercial community to an alienating modern metropolis and he condemned in his poetry and his visual works the evils that he saw arise in the wake of such a transformation. He saw himself as working within and against these metamorphoses, with a role of spiritual guardian or watchman, and prophetic protestor. Blake's other major works including Europe and America show that he is keenly engaged with contextual historical events of revolution and war as archetypal forces for cleansing and renewal, and he sees these as connected with the wider world, with Britain, not merely being of internal relevance for the countries concerned. In order to visualise such vast movements of oppression and liberation affecting the individual, Blake consistently returns to images of chains, nets, and webs, for example: 'These were the Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces:/Like nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity/And all the rest a desart;/Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated & erased'[262]. Through institutional oppression, whether by state, government, church or school, an individual's vision of the world can be forcibly closed until every house becomes a den, every man is bound, and the shadows are filled with spectres, the windows barred: 'Over the doors Thou shalt not; & over the chimneys Fear is written:/With bands of iron round their necks fasten'd into the walls/The citizens: in leaden gyves the inhabitants of suburbs/Walk heavy: soft and bent are the bones of villagers'[263]. Against the contextual evils of 'The Looms & Mills & Prisons & Work-houses'[264], which are our 'Furnaces of affliction', Blake speaks out, and he envisages Los as engaged in an eternal battle with these recurring evils of exploitation and misery, 'Which Los with his mighty Hammer demolishes time on time/In miracles & wonders in the Four-fold Desart of Albion/Permanently Creating to be in Time Reveald & Demolishd'[265].

Blake's personal context was one of poverty and frugality. His work as a commercial engraver working in the accepted etching and engraving manner of his time provided him with the necessary income to support the 'uncommercial production of the illuminated books' which were the 'chief Vehicle of his Genius'[266]; however, Blake was never a wealthy man. His wife Catherine, without fuss, prompted Blake with a silent reminder of empty plates when she felt it was time for her husband to return from the other world to the grounded provision of their daily bread. It is said that she always held a 'secret precautionary guinea in reserve'[267]. Their personal economic circumstances, and Blake's

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[261] Vaughan (1999) p59
[262] The Song of Los Plate 4 lines 1-4
[263] Europe Plate 12 lines 26-31
[264] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 13 line 57
[265] See Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 73 lines 2-15 & 32-34
[266] Tate Gallery (2000) p168
[267] Wilson (1971) p19

often humiliating repudiation by members of finer society, meant that he had a keen sensibility of class distinction, and this may have contributed to his sensitivity to the poverty-stricken state of the lower classes in his area and throughout wider London. The context of his training as an engraver with Henry Basire and his entry into the Royal Academy in 1779 when his Apprenticeship ended, meant that he was aware of formal contemporary practice, but his vision was a singular one, and Blake took his own road. At the end of the eighteenth century, artists were judged by the norms of their practices, and Blake broke with these conventions[268]: 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans/I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create/So Los, in fury & strength: in indignation & burning wrath ... stamps around the Anvil, beating blows of stern despair'[269].

One last context for Blake's prophetic poetry and designs was contemporary religious practice, which he termed 'The Net of Religion'[270]. Blake believed that Man's spiritual life was shaped by his creative energy: 'Energy is Eternal Delight'. For him life was literally the fiery force of God within: 'God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men'[271]. This is akin to Hopkins' concepts of 'instress' and 'selving' which Blake articulates in his own way: 'Thou hearest the Nightingale begin the Song of Spring ... His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather/On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence/Divine'[272]. Blake's position is clear regarding the God within: 'I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;/Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me'[273]. Blake perceives the fiery energy of God as upholding our lives and our actions[274]. He is strenuous in consistently attempting to articulate this 'alternative' reality to the material, superficial world, to have us see the God within: 'I strove to sieze the inmost Form/With ardor fierce & hands of flame'[275]. Blake offers us a conception of God which is simply the Christ within the human breast. He is not a God afar off, remote and inaccessible, but is rather the vision, the imagination, the capacity to believe in an ultimate good, to forgive mistakes and weaknesses, and the determination to build the New Jerusalem. This makes man more than, as Thomas says, merely organic beings of tissue and H_2O activated by

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[268] Vaughan (1999) p6
[269] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 10 lines 20-24
[270] The [First] Book of Urizen Chapter VIII Plate 25 line 22
[271] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 16 line 14
[272] Milton Book the Second Plate 31 lines 28-35; cf Hopkins: 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God./It will flame out, like shining from shook foil ... nature is never spent;/There lives the dearest freshness deep down things' 'God's Grandeur' Gardner (1967) No 31 p66
[273] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 lines 18-19
[274] cf the manuscript version of Jerusalem Plate 3 'To the Public' where 'Jesus our Lord' is designated as 'the God [of Fire] and Lord [of Love] – lines 14-15
[275] The Pickering Manuscript 'The Crystal Cabinet' stanza 6 Complete Poems (1997) p505

'cells firing'[276], not because of what man is, but because of what lies within man. This perspective ensures that however we may fall, God falls with us. He becomes as we are, in order that we may be as he is[277].

From Blake's reliance upon the validity of the inner 'fire' or spirit of God which upholds and sustains all life, comes his 'hatred of ceremonial'[278]. In his Swedenborgian period Blake valued the New Church because 'The Whole of the New Church is in the Active Life & not in Ceremonies at all'[279]. Blake always places emphasis on active doing through directed choice and will, rather than on empty ritual observances that can mask hypocrisy. Blake's antinomian[280] (and prophetic) stance argues that 'The laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial & real) the basest & most oppressive of human codes. & being like all other codes given under pretence of divine command were what Christ pronounced them The Abomination that maketh desolate i.e. State Religion which is the Source of all Cruelty'[281]. As if to underline this point of view, Blake inscribed his engraving of the Laocoön with the antinomian maxim, 'The outward ceremony is Antichrist'[282].

IX

These contexts, exterior and interior, relate to Blake's prophetic act of witness – not only witness to the specified period of time in which he lived (as we have seen), but also witness to humanity in an ahistorical sense: 'No period of history is very remote when seen through the eyes of a poet'[283]. Blake held a strong belief in the transhistorical value of all great art, and wrote that 'true Art is Calld Gothic in All Ages''[284]. He believed this because he believed that the condition of Man moved in cycles and continually required re-adjustment or re-alignment in order to bring his condition closer to wisdom and truth. Man required saving because he was always falling: 'now the times are return'd upon thee ... Loud howls the eternal Wolf: the eternal Lion lashes his tail!'[285]. Blake believed that Eternity actively participated in the quotidian moment, the 'Minute Particulars' of the day, Eternity in love with the 'productions' of time[286]. In this sense, Satan and God, and all of the giant archetypes which Blake visualises, must work continuously and eternally at the smithy that

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[276] R S Thomas: 'Seventieth Birthday' in Between (1981) from Collected (1993) p384
[277] Percival (1938) p291
[278] Percival (1938) p129
[279] Erdman (1998) p605
[280] 'Antinomian means "against the law" and describes a heretical hostility to the authority of the moral law which plagued the Christian Church more or less from its inception' Mee (1992) p57
[281] Erdman (1988) p618
[282] Erdman (1988) p274
[283] Gillham (1966) p1
[284] Erdman (1988) p559
[285] America Plate 9 line 19 & 27
[286] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 'Proverbs of Hell' line 15

is Mankind: 'Satan labour'd all day. it was a thousand years'[287]. Fallen man continually begets himself in his own image, Los goes in to the first female Enitharmon: 'Eternity shudder'd when they saw,/Man begetting his likeness,/On his own divided image'. Man begets his own evil from himself in continual revolutions, and in this way evil returns to life in a lineage that cannot fail: 'A shriek ran thro' Eternity:/And a paralytic stroke;/At the birth of the Human shadow'[288].

Blake's idea of 'contraries' underlines this ongoing struggle. The Fall can be interpreted as a product of Eve's innocence, not her guilt, and the Innocence and Experience which is represented in the Songs provides us with two unresolved contraries which simultaneously exist within life: 'two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence'[289]. In Blake's view it is religion which endeavours to effect this reconciliation[290], wrongly, for he points out that Jesus did not wish to unite but to separate (the sheep from the goats)[291]. Blake perceives mortal existence as creating an endless pairing of contraries or opposites[292]: 'To Create the lion & wolf the bear: the tyger & ounce:/To Create the wooly lamb & downy fowl & scaly serpent/The summer & winter: day & night: the sun & moon & stars/The tree: the plant: the flower: the rock: the stone: the metal:/Of Vegetative Nature'[293]. These labour in endless strife which is revolution towards a changed way of being that Blake sees as a process of perfectibility. Life energy and its use produces resolving or transforming visions of change, for any revolution has to be won 'first in the mind' before it can triumph elsewhere[294].

Blake fulfils the function, then, of ahistorical witness to the underlying (and unseen) eternal processes of life. His works function as a collection of signposts which should aid our orientation within the reality of historical strife in the world and Blake tells us what we can do to participate in, and alter, this ongoing process. Blake is attempting to raise our consciousness and provide direction by way of integrated visual experiences – the word leads, and a corresponding image either harmonises or accompanies, but certainly modifies the context of the word and makes it function differently. Blake symbolically witnesses to

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[287] Milton Book the First Plate 7 line 13
[288] The [First] Book of Urizen Chapter VI Plate 19 numbered Stanzas 1-10
[289] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 16 lines 15-17
[290] *ibid* line 18: 'Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two'
[291] cf Blake's visual emphasis on this in Plate 3 of Jerusalem 'To the Public' where at the top left and right he writes: 'Sheep' and 'Goats' as opposing contraries
[292] cf Hopkins: 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves' for a similar black/white 'part, pen, pack' separation and contrary which is in opposing strife: 'Now her all in two flocks, two folds – black, white; right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind/But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other; of a rack/Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind' Gardner (1967) No 61 p97
[293] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 73 lines 17-21
[294] For this discussion see Vaughan (1999) p30

man's real contrary experiences - in ease, rejoicing in the 'tents of prosperity', triumphing in the summer sun, the waggons loaded with corn; in hardship of groan and dolour, the slave grinding at the mill, and the captive in chains[295]. Blake's response to his vision of the cyclic and eternal nature of man is that 'Ages are All Equal. But Genius is Always Above The Age'[296]. Blake saw his genius as being exactly this: above the age yet witnessing to that age: 'The story of Albion and Jerusalem encompasses world history. The process of the spiritual fall and regeneration is presented as both beginning and ending in Britain'[297]. Blake sees that the diachronic reality of man's nature must be faced and challenged in the synchronic quotidian, the 'Moment' of revolutionary crisis conceived of as 'a believable rupture in the fabric of historical time'[298].

X

In spite of the dangers of witnessing to the times, (which Blake saw as comprising both contemporary situation and eternal plan), he was sure of his personal prophetic task and continued to progress this task within his own unique and gifted works. Blake saw his task as being a moral, spiritual, and political one which comprised a critique of society, nations, and individuals, but one which was actively engaged in proclamation (not prediction), and 'telling forth' (not divination). As such, his task was ultimately didactic.

Fisher summarises the ideal of prophetic task: 'The prophet's duty is to teach man to use his powers of perception and to warn him against the worship of the lesser deities of his own momentary aims'[299]. Blake hopes to move our perception away from the quotidian and material, and re-orientate it towards the eternal and spiritual[300]. He extols human life and deprecates its failures whilst telling us of our duty to heed him: 'O What Wonders are the Children of Men! Would to God that they would Consider it. That they would Consider their Spiritual Life, Regardless of that faint Shadow Call'd Natural Life, & that they would Promote Each others' Spiritual Labours, Each according to its Rank, & that they would know that Receiving a Prophet As a Prophet is a Duty which If omitted is more Severley Avenged than Every Sin & Wickedness beside'[301]. He complains, as the Hebrew Bible prophets before him complained, that no-one listens, that no-one is interested in spirituality, or eternity, or indeed God, but that he must continue his task nonetheless: 'All things acted

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[295] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the Second Page 35 lines 16-19 & Page 36 lines 1-13
[296] Erdman (1988) p649 Annotations to the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds
[297] Vaughan (1999) p60
[298] N Williams (1998) p147
[299] Fisher (1961) p19
[300] Blake to William Hayley, 11 December 1805: William Blake. The Letters of William Blake. 3rd edn. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980. p120
[301] *ibid* p120

on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of/Los's Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works/With every pathetic story possible to happen from Hate or/Wayward Love & every sorrow & distress is carved here/Every Affinity of Parents Marriages & Friendships are here/In all their various combinations wrought with wondrous Art/All that can happen to Man in his pilgrimage of seventy years'[302]. This is his tale and he tells it in order to teach: 'Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education'[303]. Blake exhorts us, giving us an imperative of warning: 'Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation'[304].

The 'heart' is the principle which we must adopt in our pilgrimage: 'Whilst Virtue is our walking staff,/And Truth a lantern to our path;/We can abide life's pelting storm/That makes our limbs quake, if our hearts be warm'[305]. As such, the building of communal life becomes a personal task for Blake: 'We builded Jerusalem as a City & a Temple: from Lambeth/We began our Foundations; lovely Lambeth! ... For Jerusalem lies in ruins & the Furnaces of Los are builded there'[306]. The foundation for Jerusalem the ideal city amid the ideal world, located in the real, begins with both Lambeth and Blake himself: his place, his workshop, his vision. Blake felt personally responsible for this task of restoring fallen and separated man to his rightful unity with God, for re-integrating all that had been fragmented.

Blake views his task as a restorative one, for it is the poet or prophet who must restore a vision of man's common humanity as well as his infinite variety, so that cynicism and rationalism can be challenged by love[307]. Blake's task rests on his belief in himself as Prophet of a New Age, due to his experience of divine intervention. Blake perceived the workings of the divine plan as being illustrated through the progression of Old Testament religion as described in the Hebrew Bible. Working within their times, the priestly line and the prophetic line adopted and supported the same received history. It is the prophetic spirit, inherited by Blake as the Poetic Genius, however, that develops from this a transforming vision by way of poetry and language: 'English, the rough basement./Los built the stubborn structure of the Language, acting against/Albions melancholy, who must else have been a Dumb despair'[308]. As One Man, Blake, Los and Milton answer Jerusalem's 'Dumb despair' by being prolific. Los is convinced of his personal task,

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[302] Jerusalem Chapter One Plate 16 line 67
[303] There Is No Natural Religion [a] 'The Argument'
[304] Milton Book the First Plate 7 line 16
[305] *Poems written in a Copy of* Poetical Sketches 'Song 3rd By An Old Shepherd' stanza 2 Complete Poems (1997) p62
[306] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 84 lines 3-6
[307] Erdman (1969) p144
[308] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 36 [40] lines 58-60

working within the wheeling cycles of life and time, its outer circumferential limit (opakeness) pivoting on its core inner point (contraction):

> I have innocence to defend and ignorance to instruct:
> I have no time for seeming; and little arts of compliment,
> In morality and virtue: in self-glorying and pride.
> There is a limit of Opakeness, and a limit of Contraction;
> In every Individual Man, and the limit of Opakeness,
> Is named Satan: and the limit of Contraction is named Adam[309]

When man is in Beulah[310], Jesus (all-encompassing because he represents circumference) becomes Adam (the singular core)[311] in order that he 'may in process of time be born Man to redeem'[312]. As we have seen, Blake envisages this 'Fall' and 'Redemption' process as continuing in ceaseless cycles through eternity: 'there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of Translucence,/In the bosom of Man for ever from eternity to eternity' and it is through this ongoing process that Man is redeemed: 'the Divine hand found the Two Limits, Satan and Adam,/In Albions bosom: for in every Human bosom those Limits stand'[313]. Blake's personal task works within such limits of 'Contraction' and 'Expansion', the real world of Adam (Man) comprising the 'dark Satanic Mills' of life which it is Blake's task to fight. He sees his task as being involved in an eternal war, requiring war gear[314]. He needs his 'Bow of burning gold', his 'Arrows of desire', his 'Spear', and his 'Chariot of fire'[315] infused with Divine flame, to progress his task, and he pledges to God who gave him this commission: 'I will not cease from Mental Fight,/Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:/Till we have built Jerusalem,/In Englands green & pleasant Land'[316]. The 'we' refers to Blake and God working together, just as much as it does Blake and Milton, Blake and Los, or Blake and Rintrah. It also refers to Blake and us. His 'Fight' is always done in collaboration with 'other' forces and agency.

The antithesis which Blake fights is Satanic energy: 'When Satan first the black bow bent/And the Moral Law from the Gospel rent/He forgd the Law into a Sword/And spilld

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[309] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 42 lines 26-31; cf footnotes 308 and 163

[310] For fallen Mankind, Beulah is the way back to Eden: it is the subconscious, and the source of poetry; it is also the Hebrew for 'married land' – the name which will be given to Palestine when returned to God's favour (when returned to covenant); cf Isaiah 62:4 - this link renders the subconscious or the source of poetry as the means to the promised land, the means to redemption.

[311] cf also footnote 163 for Ulro: east as *core* of circle, or *contraction*, west as Eden at *circumference*, or *expansion*.

[312] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 42 lines 32-36

[313] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 31 [35] lines 1-2

[314] See 'Jerusalem' or 'Mental Fight' which is the pledge that begins Milton, the Book which considers Blake's personal task as poet and prophet as lying within an inherited tradition and the *auctors* from whose lineage he gains his authority, and in whose wake he works.

[315] In the Hebrew Bible chariots were looked upon as symbols of the worldly splendour of a king: I Sam 8:11

[316] cf also Thomas: 'Not done yet,' mutters/the old man, fitting a bent/poem to his broken bow … So I refine/my weapons … composer of the first/radio-active verses' 'Not done yet' The Echoes Return Slow (1988) p75

the blood of mercys Lord'[317]. This reference to the 'black bow' and the 'sword' link these lines with the above pledge, and Blake will fight Satan by way of the heart's energy, which has such weapons:

> And the bow is a Male & Female & the Quiver of the Arrows of Love,
> Are the Children of this Bow: a Bow of Mercy & Loving-kindness: laying
> Open the hidden Heart in Wars of mutual Benevolence Wars of Love[318]

All of these ideas are combined by Blake within 'The Rout of the Rebel Angels', a pen and watercolour of 1808[319] which portrays a kneeling Christ within a circumference, bow in hand, routing the rebel angels back into Hell. The figure also represents Los: 'Los flamd in my path & the Sun was hot/With the bows of my Mind & the Arrows of Thought/My bowstring fierce with Ardour breathes/My arrows glow in their golden sheaves'[320]. The figure is also Blake himself according to his pledge before Milton, as an agent of redemption who routs moral error and the spiritual darkness of 'Urizen' through the power of the artistic imagination[321]. The rout of Satanic forces is not necessarily a victory over an exterior enemy, but can be a struggle to cast out devils that exist within the mind and either divide the self, or place the self before others. Blake's 'Mental Fight' is waged in the intellectual world, he aims at our minds with his 'Arrows of desire'. His arena is his poetry, paintings and engravings, the media of the 'seen', but it is through the perception of the heart rather than the eyes that his task will be progressed. As we see, so will we be changed (and judged). Blake fights for the return of Jerusalem, the reconstitution of human unity, Redemption from Fall, and he carries out this task in England, specifically Lambeth: 'When shall Jerusalem return & overspread all the Nations/Return: return to Lambeths Vale O building of human souls'[322]. It is a real place that mourns what is lost: 'Lambeth mourns calling Jerusalem. she weeps & looks abroad/For the Lords coming, that Jerusalem may overspread all Nations'[323].

These ideas of war, weaponry, specifically bow, arrows, spear, sword, chariot, as well as the imagery of 'The Rout of the Rebel Angels' along with 'God Judging Adam', are influenced by Milton's Paradise Lost, within whose visual legacy Blake positions himself[324]. Blake's weapons, including his own illuminated books and poetry are seen as

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[317] Jerusalem Plate 52 'To the Deists' lines 17-20
[318] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 97 lines 12-14
[319] See Figure 18 'The Rout of the Rebel Angels' Tate Gallery (2000) p229
[320] Poems from Letters: 'To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802' Complete Poems (1977) p 487 lines 77-80
[321] See also Plate 39 from Jerusalem where Los, with a huge bow and arrow drawn and ready, threefold, protects the Gate of Eden
[322] Milton Book the First Plate 6 lines 18-19
[323] Milton Book the First Plate 25 lines 54-55
[324] Paradise Lost (1971) VI 749-866: 'Dawning through heaven; forth rushed with whirlwind sound/The chariot of paternal deity,/Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel … He, in celestial panoply all armed … beside him hung his bow,/And quiver … He on his impious foes right onward drove,/Gloomy as night; under his burning wheels … Nor less

tools in the struggle for artistic and spiritual regeneration[325]. The chariot wheels are the wheels of fire which work 'From west to east against the current of/Creation' and devour all things in their 'loud/Fury & thundering course round heaven & earth'[326]. Yet the wheel is also 'the Wheel of Religion' and 'Jesus died because he strove/Against the current of this Wheel'[327]. Blake emphasises to us that Jesus' task was one of opposition, protest and iconoclasm. This is prophetic task, employing the understanding that things have to be broken down before they can be built up[328]. This brings us back to the idea of continuity lying within (and beneath) discontinuity, of breaking in order to free, of fracturing in order to allow an underlying contained ethos to re-surface anew. Jesus speaks in 'The Everlasting Gospel' saying what he and his task were 'sent against': 'I am doing my Fathers Business/He scornd Earths Parents scornd Earths God/And mockd the one & the others Rod/His Seventy Disciples sent/Against Religion & Government'[329].

In returning to 'Lambeths Vale' to engage in the task of building human souls, Blake sees the quest for the New Jerusalem as one which is a quest not only for the regeneration of man's body and state (Albion), but also for the construction of the 'just' city: 'unless we visualize the unfallen state as a city it will always seem to be impotent and transient compared to the fallen world'[330]. Blake is here striving for real 'objective correlatives' to archetypal and eternal warfare, correlatives which will empower us to see these things as happening right here, right now. He reaches after images and ideas which are readily available to contemporary sensibility, just as the Hebrew Bible prophets used the artefacts, professions, and landscapes of their surrounding times to bring their ideas real and alive before the people. Blake envisages the task of building Jerusalem, as a real city that could be built by human hands. This locates the ideal of Jerusalem within the reality of London, locates the ideal of redemption within the reality of the body. Blake conceives of man (Albion) as being a City of God. Imagination itself also exists immortally not only as a person (Los) but as part of a growing and consolidating city, the Golgonooza, which when complete will be the emanation, or created achievement, of Albion, Jerusalem[331].

Blake, as a personification himself of Albion, labours at this creation task from its inside – eternity in love with the artistic productions of his specific, personal, and real, time.

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on either side tempestuous fell/His arrows ... he meant/Not to destroy, but root them out of heaven ... headlong themselves they threw/Down from the verge of heaven: eternal wrath/Burnt after them to the bottomless pit'; cf also Ezekiel I and X from which much of Milton's and Blake's imagery derives.

[325] cf **Figure 19** Jerusalem Plate [41] 46 'Albions sleep' Thames & Hudson (2000) p343; see p243 *ibid* for discussion.

[326] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To The Christians' lines 1-6

[327] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To The Christians' lines 13-20

[328] cf prophetic 'task' is: 'to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant' (Jer 1: 9-10)

[329] The Everlasting Gospel lines 33-37

[330] Frye (1947) p237

[331] Frye (1947) p248

Blake's self-appointed but divinely-sanctioned redemptive task becomes the link, the crossroads where the diachronic and synchronic meet, the prophetic crucible wherein eternity's progression takes place.

XI

Blake's sight, or rather his visionary insightedness, works within his conception of an ongoing cycle of Fall and Redemption, the Kingdom of Heaven ever at hand, an eternal fight occurring in the present within both the human body and the building of the 'just' city: 'All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone, all/Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied/Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing/And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality./And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem'[332]. Adam always begins in an 'Eternal Circle/To awake the Prisoners of Death; to bring Albion again/With Luvah into light eternal, in his eternal day'[333]. This is Blake's vision of the cyclic process of death and regeneration, heaven existing on earth. Blake uses his visionary faculty to bring light to our darkness because we, like the blind and aged Tiriel, are 'Blind to the pleasures of the sight & deaf to warbling birds'[334]. He believes that 'the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences. This faculty I treat of'[335]. He wants to help us experience by aiding our sight. His religious vision does not accept any uniform set of doctrines; rather, he strives to portray the possibility of attaining civil liberty and a common vision of the divinity and unity of Man which is life in Jesus[336]. As Williams comments, Blake's goal in most of his work is that of journey and that of change, culminating in a hard-won re-imagined vision of the ideological world[337]. This is Thomas's concern also, the request that we travel with him from a position of judgement to a position of acceptance and reconciliation. Both poets work within an ideological framework. For Blake particularly, whether he sees the nature of his work as either 'Visionary' or 'Imaginative', it is nonetheless 'an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients calld the Golden Age'[338].

Above all, it is Blake's vision to free our minds. If our minds are free, we can perceive differently and probably better, for we can come nearer to being as insighted as he is, see as he sees. Blake believes it is the imagination that brings us closest to the divine. Thus: 'let

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[332] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 99 lines 57-61
[333] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 75 lines 23-26
[334] Tiriel 4 line 29
[335] All Religions Are One The Argument
[336] Frye (1947) p340
[337] N Williams (1998) p5
[338] A Vision of the Last Judgement Erdman (1988) p555

Liberty/Blaze in each countenance, and fire the battle' because 'The enemy fight in chains, invisible chains, but heavy;/Their minds are fetter'd; then how can they be free'[339]. Blake posits imagination as being the way to attain enlightenment: 'I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination'[340], and he equates the spiritual gifts of the Apostles with both the Divine Spirit, and the Holy Ghost, the latter directly inspiring man's mind: 'The Apostles knew of no other Gospel. What were all their spiritual gifts? What is the Divine Spirit? is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain?'[341].

Blake's envisioning of the 'ideal' is however represented by his doctrine of active 'doing', of deliberate orientation and of serving community rather than the self. He believes the idea of transformation can be transmitted most effectively through the living language of symbolism rather than the fixed liturgy and iconography of any ecclesiastical institution. The living tongue of prophecy must continue, and although the prophet is succeeded by the priest, who is the representative of sacred law, the 'unacknowledged' living tongue of prophecy survives in the inspired poet who is the original representative of the arts. Blake believed that the true creative artist or poet was also an inspired prophet and that social order, by its very nature, was both restrictive and destructive. For Blake, 'both bard and prophet were united in those 'honest Men' who formed the 'Conscience' of human history'[342], men who could hear the call of the 'Eternals' and were sent against 'the primeval Priests assum'd power'[343]. Blake's 'works of genius' were for him expressions of the Holy Spirit, sent to carry out a specific task on behalf of mankind: 'A Work of Genius is a Work 'Not to be obtained by the Invocation of Memory & her Syren Daughters. but by Devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit. who can enrich with all utterance & knowledge & sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his Altar to touch & purify the lips of whom he pleases''[344]. For Blake, Los becomes his champion in conflict with 'Urizen, cold & scientific'[345], for what Urizen ultimately wants is mental uniformity, and the social product of this is the rule of tyrants over victims[346]. Los is the champion of Blake's salvific vision because Blake sees the creative imagination 'as the primary means to salvation within this materialistic world'[347].

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[339] Poetical Sketches 'King Edward the Third' lines 11-14 Complete Poems (1997) p39-40
[340] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To the Christians' lines 9-11
[341] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To the Christians' lines 15-18
[342] For a discussion of these issues, see Fisher (1961) pp24-27
[343] The [First] Book of Urizen Plate 2 Preludium
[344] Erdman (1988) p646 quotes from Milton
[345] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 38 [43] line 2
[346] Frye (1947) p222
[347] Tate Gallery (2000) p75

Blake's prophetic visionary capability is illustrated by way of his prominent use of arms and hands within his paintings and engravings. He uses these parts of human anatomy particularly in order to show that these are the main instruments of physical doing (which follows willed intention). He emphasises that what we do, how we do, matters. Thus there is a multiplicity of gesticulations: arms outspread, arms flying, hands touching, hands creating, arms and hands showing, pointing, or clasping. Here is portrayed incipient energy and the directed movement which comprises active life and living 'selving'. All of Blake's visual forms promote movement because for him 'Energy is Eternal Delight'[348] and 'Exuberance is Beauty'[349]. Blake consistently reminds us that what we do (more than either say, or believe) counts: 'By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith'[350]. Blake himself is described as being highly energetic: 'In him you saw at once the Maker, the Inventor ... He was energy itself, and shed arounds him a kindling influence; an atmosphere of life, full of the ideal. To walk with him in the country was to perceive the soul of beauty through the forms of matter'[351]. Blake was obsessed with reproducing and interpreting movement, with doing, because these are visual referents for internal states of being. Few of his figures are static and wooden, emphasising that his poetic vision involves deed.

Blake treats eyes similarly, visually portraying either single prominent eyes or eyes in a sequence. Eyes are often found on garments, on circles, in unlikely places which surprise us and 'rouze our faculties to act', reminding us that we look but do not see, and may see many things yet perceive nothing. The eyes in his paintings look at us, question us, and in this sense suffice for Blake as both mirror and judge[352]. Blake's eyes are deliberately made both lambent and directional, emphasising force and vector, the penetrating gaze[353]. Blake's prophetic vision was greatly concerned with eyes (and sight), as he himself stated: 'I rest not from my great task!/To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes/Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity/Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination'[354]. By way of his own insighted vision, he seeks to open our vision and our understanding, to counteract our propensity towards blindness and myopia which, as agents of division, lead to separation, fragmentation, and prejudice.

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[348] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 4 'The Voice of the Devil' Nos 2-3
[349] *ibid* Plate 10 line 4
[350] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 line 28
[351] Letter Samuel Palmer to Alexander Gilchrist, 23 August 1855 Keynes (1980) p174
[352] See for example, 'Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car' from The Divine Comedy Illustrations; also the eyes at the top of 'A Vision of the Last Judgment' 1808 Tate Gallery (2000) pp94 & 68
[353] See **Figure 16** 'Newton' (1795/c1805) Tate Gallery (2000) p213
[354] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 5 lines 17-20

One last revelatory component of Blake's visionary insightedness is that of fire. This is the refining, burning and cleansing element which purifies, representing in visual terms the 'instress' of Yahweh, a force that both upholds and purges[355]. This conceives of us (with biblical resonance)[356] as ore which must be smelted, hammered, shaped, and re-created - raw elemental metal turned into crafted and useful artefact. Blake's works themselves are fiery and as a force in their own right, strive to purify us as we read and see. This is visually illustrated by Blake's 'Dante in the Empyrean, Drinking at the River of Light' which portrays a river of light flowing downwards from the Eternal realm and Heaven's sun, providing man with a source at which he may drink and be spiritually refreshed. Blake's painting illustrates the Paradiso[357]. Dante writes 'I look'd;/And in the likeness of a river saw/Light flowing … As I toward the water, bending me,/To make the better mirrors of mine eyes/In the refining wave'. Blake, drinking at the river of light, is lit-up, purified, refined and refreshed by the stream of inspiration and revelation with which he is fed. He drinks from the divine water to make his mortal eyes see more clearly and be better lenses and mirrors on our behalf.

Blake's own method of printing reflects the purging element he sought to portray within his work. His method could be described as the 'contrary state' of conventional intaglio etching. Instead of covering the plate with a ground and cutting his design into it with engraver's tools, Blake worked directly in the medium of the poet and the painter using a quill pen or fine 'pencil' brush. With his pen or brush dipped in impervious liquid, he drew directly onto the polished surface of the copper[358]. The rest of the surface is then eaten away with *aquafortis* 'so that the outlines were left as a stereotype'. This method meant that everything which was of no use was burned or refined away so that only the precious line was left[359]. Blake commented on this procedure, saying that 'the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method. by corrosives, which in Hell are salutory and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid'. Percival observes that if any figure is central and dominant in Blake's myth, it is that of fire – the fire that burns in Los's 'furnaces of affliction'. This is a fire that is forever consuming the mortal and fallen forms

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[355] Jeremiah 6: 27-30; cf also Malachi: 'See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me … For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness … Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts' (Malachi 3: 1-5); cf also Ezek 22: 17-22

[356] cf Jer 9:7; Isa 1:22, 25, 48:10

[357] XXX 61-96

[358] Tate Gallery (2000) discussion p104

[359] cf also the 'beautiful line' of Hogarth

of temporal existence, refining spiritual gold in the crucible of man[360]. Blake seeks to raise our awareness of the 'spiritual body', by 'burning off' matter to display the infinite which was hid. Blake's works are themselves the refining alchemical process that can lead to redemption: 'the alchemical process represents in miniature the drama of regeneration as Blake saw it, human and even cosmic'[361], for the ultimate aim of ancient alchemy was the metamorphosis of base metal into gold[362]. In Blake's system of spiritual alchemy, the alembic is man, and the fires are the fires of spiritual tribulation, the stone being Christ[363].

Blake illustrates this process[364] in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Plate 14) which shows a supine male body being burned (or refined) by fire, with medicinal flames leaping and a raised 'spiritual body' rising like a phoenix once the 'material' body has been purged[365]. This is the human form of Blake's 'infernal method' of etching - as surfaces are bitten away, the protected spirituality of the interior that upholds the 'inscape' or exterior design of the material body, rises to transcend that body. In such a purging, the infinite is displayed, 'which was hid'. Blake had to be skilled at reverse or mirror writing in order to achieve this artistic effect, which would have meant his developing a way of looking at the world which empowered him to see it from different perspectives: from the real and the reflected. In so doing, he highlighted the fact that perspective and angle are paramount[366]: 'If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of Perception seem to vary:/If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also'[367]. How we see affects what we see: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern'[368]. Thus Blake's visionary task is not only to refine the material body, but to liberate spiritual vision, because our 'Senses' are inadequate, man's eye merely 'a little narrow orb closd up & dark', the Ear merely a 'little shell in small volutions shutting out/All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony', the tongue merely an organ that can feel 'a little moisture' and

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[360] Percival (1938) p197
[361] Percival (1938) p197
[362] Percival (1938) pp197-8
[363] Percival (1938) p207
[364] See also Jerusalem Plates 93, 99; Milton Plate 43, 8 – for figures which seem to inhabit, are cleansed, or are birthed by flame
[365] cf 'To Tirzah' **Figure 20** and the visual imagery of the spiritual body being nourished by the gift of water from the Bard: Songs of Experience Plate 52 Thames & Hudson (2000) p94
[366] Hopkins also emphasises this: 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot': a hard thing to undo the 'knot' of sight, for when 'The rainbow shines', it does so 'only in the thought/Of him that looks' - our perception elucidates what we see: sight is the Gordian knot which we must cut yet every eye perceives differently: 'many standing round a waterfall/See one bow each, yet not the same to all' - each stance or angle of looking is different, for each seer is a 'hand's breadth further than the next': relative position, angle of sight, way of looking, is different in each case therefore one's 'looking' can only be truly unique. Gardner (1967) No 91 p129
[367] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 30 [34] lines 55-56
[368] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 14 lines 10ff; a reference to Plato's cave. Blake also articulates his view of perspective elsewhere: 'The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,/Beneath the dark net of infection.//Till the shrunken eyes clouded over/Discernd not the woven hipocrisy' The [First] Book of Urizen Chapter IX lines 29-32

'a little food'[369]. We must teach our senses to perceive the unseen, the spiritual, the Divine. Blake's desire is also Ezekiel's, 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite'[370], to see within the smallest 'centre' Eternity expanding its doors[371].

Blake's seeks, through his own visionary faculty, to re-present the world to our eyes. He claims 'prophetic I behold'[372]; 'In futurity/I prophetic see'[373] because 'The Universal Father' speaks in his ear[374]. Blake believes that if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist[375], and all that Blake produces goes to the heart of our sight - perception is not something we do with our senses, it is a mental act[376]. We are all 'Mental Travellers'[377] travelling through the door of death into mortal life[378]. Frye holds that a visionary creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this world have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism[379]. This is a 'perceptive' rather than a 'contemplative' attitude of mind[380]. Blake believed that what one sees as visionary has reality; what one sees with organic perceptions has none. Mental things alone are real. In the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the poet asks the prophet Isaiah: 'Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so make it so?' The answer is that 'all poets believe that it does.' Such a firm persuasion creates its own world. What man believes, he sees: 'as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven/And Earth; & all you behold, tho' it appear Without, it is Within/In your Imagination'[381]. He wants us to see a world in a grain of sand, see Heaven in a wild flower, hold materiality in our hands and perceive infinity[382]. His didactic imperative to us is, 'O search & see: turn your eyes inward: open O thou World'[383]. However, he knows that there are different kinds of sight and vision, different levels of perception with concomitant consequences for the viewer: 'A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees'[384], and he tells us that man's desires are limited by his perceptions, for none can desire what he has not perceived[385]. Blake's world was one of imagination and vision: 'I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike'. As if to underline the importance of this he emphasised, 'To the Eyes of a Miser

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[369] Milton Book the First Plate 5 lines 21-26; see also the repetition of this in Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 49 lines 34-42
[370] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy' lines 20ff
[371] Milton Book the Second Plate 31 lines 46-49
[372] Milton Book the First Plate 7 line 23
[373] 'The Little Girl Lost' in Songs of Experience
[374] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 97 lines 5-6
[375] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 34 [38] line 13
[376] Frye (1947) p19
[377] See The Pickering Manuscript 'The Mental Traveller' Complete Poems (1997) p499
[378] 'I travel'd thro' a Land of Men/A Land of Men & Women too/And heard & saw such dreadful things/As cold Earth wanderers never knew'. 'The Mental Traveller' lines 1-4
[379] cf Hopkins: 'God's Grandeur' - 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God' Gardner (1967) No 31 p66
[380] Frye (1947) p8
[381] Percival (1938) p143
[382] The Pickering Manuscript 'Auguries of Innocence' Complete Poems (1997) p506
[383] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 39 [44] line 41
[384] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 'Proverbs of Hell' line 13
[385] There Is No Natural Religion [a] V

a Guinea is far more beautiful than the Sun', and again: 'The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way'. Imagination shows us how to look: 'to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees'. Blake links 'truth' with sight, truth should not be confined to any 'mathematical' demonstration; he who does not know truth at sight is unworthy of her[386].

Blake demands an exuberantly active mind, not a quiescent blank slate, because the imaginative mind can realise its own freedom and understand that perception means self-development[387]. This is close to Thomas's conception of self-analysis and self-awareness as being keys to movement from one position to another. We can only perceive God when we are older, and can stand the truth[388]. Blake supports his own 'fourfold' spiritual vision: 'What it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it'[389]. Blake presents to us, as does Hopkins, a window for us to look through, a pre-existing vision of immanent divinity, like Ezekiel's, which can be used as frame. Blake also presents to us, as does Thomas, a process of self-examination and subsequent movement of perception that is based on the principle of looking through different lenses in order to provoke concomitant shifts in understanding. Both processes attempt to awaken spiritual sight and develop the self.

One of Blake's works symbolically represents prophetic visionary insightedness: 'The Lawn with the Kings and Angels'[390]. This is an illustration of Dante's Purgatorio where Dante and Virgil are led to the Valley of Negligent Rulers by the poet Sordello[391]. The pen and ink watercolour shows the kings grouped under a canopy of trees (which symbolise error) and the aphorism 'can't see the wood for the trees' is pertinent here. This canopy or veil of 'the real' (the organic and material) prevents the mortal group from accessing their spiritual sight: seeing the angels with their flaming swords overhead (guarding archetypal good), or seeing the serpent off to the side but advancing (representing archetypal evil). Blake conceived of these archetypal contraries as real forces striving against one another. In juxtaposition and contrast to the blind kings, the three immortal poets (representing

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[386] Annotations to the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds Erdman (1988) p659
[387] Frye (1947) p23
[388] R S Thomas 'The Minister' Selected Poems (1973) p14
[389] 'A Vision of the Last Judgment' Erdman (1988) p565-6
[390] See **Figure 21** 'The Lawn with the Kings and Angels' Tate Gallery (2000) p90 - which effectively summarises prophetic vision
[391] Purgatorio VII 64-90 and VIII 1-39 and 94-108

active and inspired imagination or Divine Vision) are shown advancing on the scene, surveying events with their panoramic (visionary) sight. These poets as prophets or three wise men, see the material (kings and court, the trees, the landscape etc), *and* the spiritual (the angels and the devil).

Blake seeks to communicate spiritual truth: 'Poetry is the revelation of truth as perceived by the individual soul'[392]. Blake's eyes, trained on his daily reality, were like the corrosives with which he etched out his words and design on the copperplate. Both his eyes and his artistic techniques were the cleansing and refining force that penetrated the detritus of daily life to expose the spiritual truth concealed below[393]. Frye believes there is no revelation *except* that which unites the human with the divine. In this way our moral acts owe their value, not to faith in the unseen, but to what we actually do see, a vision of the world as fallen, redeemed and proceeding to apocalypse. This vision is a framework for all good acts, and the more consciously the good act is related to it, the better it is[394]. Thus Blake's revelation of life is one of transformation, of movement or progression *from* Ulro (this material world) *through* Generation (the act of true love) passing *to* Beulah (the realm of the subconscious), from which one can progress *onto* the spiritual Eden (the highest state) or fall back to Ulro again. This is a vision of perfectibility, self-analysis and self-regulation which results in more perfect engagement with the self, others, the wider world. Blake saw the visionary artist as being instrumental in this process, in helping others to climb to their rightful state before God: 'The Artist is an inhabitant of [Eden] that happy country; and if everything goes on as it has begun, the world of vegetation and generation may expect to be opened again to Heaven, through Eden [the artist as medium], as it was in the beginning'[395].

Revelation is a seeing beneath surface appearance, and how we look determines what we see. Those who 'reason', only see a false appearance, for example the Earth viewed from a 'ratio' perspective becomes merely 'a Globe rolling thro Voidness, it is a delusion of Ulro/The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope. they alter/The ratio of the Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouched'[396]. This viewpoint of Blake's has echoes with Thomas's stance. Both are interested in perspective with respect to looking inward and dissecting by way of the microscope, or looking outward at space using the telescope. Both are concerned with how such lenses can distort both vision and truth, and cause the

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[392] Max Plowman. An Introduction to the Study of Blake. London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1927. p5
[393] Vaughan (1999) p34
[394] Frye (1947) p250
[395] A Descriptive Catalogue Gilchrist (1998) p515
[396] Milton Book The First Plate 29 lines 15-18

'seer' to see 'ratio' only. The 'Spectators Organs' can leave the 'Objects untouched' because these distorting lenses and the distorted *a priori* stance already present before the person looks, affects the seeing but tells no truth about what is seen. Blake exhorts us to be careful how we see. Materiality by its nature is deceptive, and dissection reveals nothing. Love cannot be found by cutting open a heart, nor can spirit be found by felling a tree: 'For every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood,/Is visionary: and is created by the Hammer of Los/And every Space smaller than a Globule of Mans blood, opens/Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow'[397]. In order to have a revelatory vision that tells us the truth of life, we have to see beyond materiality and beyond our own tools by which we measure and judge. Only by doing so can we perceive active spirit and the presence of God.

Blake's revelation empowers us to look at the minute and see the universe contained therein, immanent spiritual fire infusing all things. He attempts to make the invisible visible, and the intangible concrete. He glances from heaven to earth and earth to heaven, his imagination, through his pen, giving to 'airy nothing'[398], 'a name and a habitation/Delightful'[399]. Blake's inspired revelation provides us with gifts in order that we may see the world clearly, with all of its existing contraries. He hopes we might imagine it changed by way of our own hands: 'Creating the beautiful House for the piteous sufferer'. So must we do on earth - create form and beauty around its dark regions of sorrow.

XII

The reality of failure and ineffectuality in mission is inherent within prophetic vocation[400]. Blake 'had himself known considerable disappointment in his own poetry's reception'[401]. In spite of this 'With astonishing perseverance he continued to address his remarks 'To the Public' who paid no attention'[402]. Blake may have been compelled to speak, but he knew his audience were not listening:

> Albion heard him not; obdurate! Hard!
> He frown'd on all his Friends, counting them enemies in his sorrow[403]

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[397] Milton Book The First Plate 29 lines 19-22
[398] Shakespeare 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Act 5 Sc 1 lines 5-17 Complete Oxford II (1987) p595
[399] Milton Book The First Plate 28 line 3-4
[400] Christ is representative of the prophetic tradition precisely because his life ends amid failure, misunderstanding and rejection. The paradigm of success is that it emerges out of failure - Christ could not be the figure that he is theologically without this.
[401] N Williams (1998) p161
[402] Fisher (1961) p4
[403] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 40 [45] lines 35-36; Plate 41 [46] lines 10-11; 16

Blake progressed his prophetic task, with its incipient failure and ineffectuality in mission, only because he was capable of seeing beyond the quotidian where he worked. He perceived his work as a human affirmation of meaning in the face of an indifferent cosmos[404]. Within a context of failure Blake sees himself as one of those who appear in one time, speaking of eternity: the work of Los, like that of Sisyphus, is a process of 'continually building & continually decaying desolate/In eternal labours'[405]. At the darkest moment in Milton, Los gives up, yet almost immediately galvanises himself to go on:

> Los ... gave up himself to tears.
> He sat down on his anvil-stock; and leand upon the trough.
> Looking into the black water, mingling it with tears.
> At last when desperation almost tore his heart in twain
> He recollected an old Prophecy in Eden recorded,
> And often sung to the loud harp at the immortal feasts
> That Milton of the Land of Albion should up ascend
> Forwards from Ulro from the Vale of Felpham; and set free
> Orc from his Chain of Jealousy, he started at the thought
> And down descended[406]

Los, Blake and Milton together expose the workings of Eternity from the Vale of Felpham, with the task to 'set free'. Plate 41 [46] of Jerusalem illustrates this[407]. This is emblematic of Blake's own mission, portraying an active chariot of genius carrying a sleeping man and woman (Albion and Enitharmon, themselves personifications of Blake's audience) who sit passively. Astride the beasts are two prophetic eagle-men (Los and his Scribe Ely, pen in hand) controlling the chariot. This portrayal represents Blake's own epic machinery and personal intent, denoting both gift and directed will, a driven and driving energy[408]. Blake's representation of his *alter ego* here as writer, as eagle (referring to John), as prophet and poet, shows him pointing the way with his pen, his poetry and artistry the urgent means of forward momentum and orientation within a chaotic world[409]. The plate visually encompasses Blake's prophetic task, his attempt to build on earth an imitation of *civitas dei*. Note, too, the penetrating and all-encompassing flame from the furnaces of Los which consumes yet upholds the entire process: the active, fiery force of God within. The

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[404] W J T Mitchell. Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978. p216

[405] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 53 line 19

[406] Milton Book the First Plate 20 lines 53-60; this discussed in Mitchell (1978) p217

[407] See **Figure 19** Jerusalem Plate [41] 46 'Albions sleep' Thames & Hudson (2000) p343

[408] Mitchell (1978) p216

[409] See the pictorial representation of 'Hand', a body infused with flame and the hands spread wide, the feet carrying the body forward, which relates to active doing by Blake in terms of, literally, his handiwork written and visual with which he protested against his many outspoken enemies Jerusalem Plate 26 (Frontispiece Ch 2) 'Hand and Jerusalem' Tate Gallery (2000) p288-9: 'Hand' active 'Among the Sons of Albion', progressing his 'visions' in pursuit of 'liberty'; cf 'Satan his name: in flames of fire/He stretch'd his Druid Pillars far' Plate 27 'To the Jews' 39-40; 'my Selfhood! Satan! armd in gold' *ibid* line 76; compare The [First] Book of Urizen Plate 3 Tate Gallery (2000) p253

chariot may be large and unwieldy in contrast to the eagle-men controlling it, emphasising the possibility of consistent failure, but the implication is that they create anyway.

Blake by 1787, aged 30, had experienced three 'failures' in his life. One: he had failed to make his mark as a history painter. During the 1780's Blake was using British history, Shakespeare and the Bible for his paintings as an 'historical artist', but his handling of human anatomy was considered 'deviant', his gothic flowing line with its expressive power was not the accepted mode of the static and classical. He was passed-over as an artist and engraver when Boydell commissioned leading historical artists of the day to depict scenes from Shakespeare. This left Blake isolated within the painting 'world'. Two: Blake had failed to establish a business as an engraver (the business he set up with James Parker in 1784 had to be dissolved). Three: his Poetical Sketches were printed in 1783 but never properly published. Whilst a sense of failure might result from these, paradoxically the dynamism and energy of Blake's career comes from just this dialogue between success and setback that runs through it[410]. Ackroyd turns ideas of failure around, justifying Blake's view of his own spirituality: 'as if in flight from the recognition of his apparent failure in this world, he was often concerned to exert or exalt his status in the 'spiritual world', which he considered to be the true aim of his endeavours'[411].

A feeling of inadequacy and futility, allied to personal experience of failure are normal experiences for the prophet[412]. Blake also had difficulty in equating a benevolent God with one who could not only allow, but actively create, creatures who could visit cruelties upon one another, and he is Jeremiac in his complaint[413]: 'Why trembles honesty and like a murderer,/Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station!/Must the generous tremble & leave his joy, to the idle: to the pestilence!/That mock him? who commanded this? what God? what Angel?/To keep the gen'rous from experience till the ungenerous/Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature;/Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science,/That men get rich by, & the sandy desart is giv'n to the strong/What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest/What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs/What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself/In fat of lambs? no more I follow, no more obedience pay'[414]. Blake knew that the strong in society always gain at the expense of the weak, and that inequality, sorrow, exploitation, poverty, were rife among his contemporaries in London. He believed

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[410] Vaughan (1999) p8
[411] Peter Ackroyd: Tate Gallery (2000) p11
[412] See Poems from Letters: 'To Thomas Butts, 16 August 1803' which is redolent of Jeremiah's complaints before God relating both to inadequacy and failure Complete Poems (1997) p487
[413] cf Hopkins' Jeremiac complaint in 'Justus es', echoing Jeremiah 12:1-5
[414] America Plate 11 lines 4-15

that it was his duty to identify the causes of evil and to enable all people to share a vision of change and transcendance, even although no-one appeared to be listening.

Allied to Blake's feeling of failure and ineffectuality is a concomitant desperation to elicit divine aid in the promulgation of what is often perceived to be an overwhelming task: 'Teach me O Holy Spirit the Testimony of Jesus! let me/Comprehend wonderous things out of the Divine Law/I behold Babylon in the opening Streets of London, I behold/Jerusalem in ruins wandering about from house to house/This I behold the shudderings of death attend my steps/I walk up and down in Six Thousand Years: their Events are present before me'[415]. This is not only a plea for divine inspiration and knowledge, aid to speak, it is also vision *sub specie aeternitatis* and is an authoritative utterance of what the speaker actually experiences here and now within the larger movement of eternal time. In this way, eternity exists in the present moment[416]. Temporal perception of inadequacy can be countered by the self-belief and self-confidence that comes from a divinely-assisted vocation and a task that works on behalf of humanity and its progression onward through time, beyond the failure of the quotidian: 'Shudder not, but Write, & the hand of God will assist you! Therefore I write Albions last words'[417]. In this way, Blake strengthens his feeling of failure, by believing that in the long term, if not in the present, his works will have meaning.

XIII

Blake articulates his prophetic 'fourfold' vision, his revelations, through language. Blake's prophetic 'poetry of protest' deliberately utilises rhetorical techniques in order to persuade. Blake considered poetic inspiration and prophetic vision to be one and the same, and he believed Hebrew prophecy to be simply poetry of the highest order. His prophetic 'forth-telling' communicates through a deliberate rhetoric: 'In silence the Divine Lord builded with immortal labour,/Of gold & jewels a sublime Ornament, a Couch of repose,/With Sixteen pillars: canopied with emblems & written verse./Spiritual Verse, order'd & measur'd, from whence, time shall reveal'[418]. Blake sees himself as building a building of 'spiritual verse' with its own ordered and measured foundations and pillars of support. He marshals his verse for the day of battle: 'Hearing the march of long resounding strong

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[415] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 74 lines 14-19
[416] 'In shadowy pomp by the Eternal Prophet created evermore/For Los in Six Thousand Years walks up & down continually/That not one Moment of Time be lost & every revolution/Of Space he makes permanent' Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 75 lines 6-9
[417] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 47 lines 16-17
[418] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 48 lines 5-8

heroic Verse/Marshalld in order for the day of Intellectual Battle'[419]. Given that Blake's task is a pledge to 'Mental Fight', his whole enterprise in words and vision is an intellectual battle to win hearts and minds by persuasion, because our return to Israel is a 'Return to Mental Sacrifice & War'[420]. Blake wants his rhetorical didacticism to be instrumental in instigating a return to spiritual heart, and knows the importance of oratorical technique in achieving this. The danger of monotony is as much a bondage 'as rhyme itself', therefore Blake has endeavoured to produce 'variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts – the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race!'[421]. Blake's intent is to give us a theory of his own carefully crafted rhetoric, designed to provide variety, stimulus, to claim reader attention and persuade.

Blake draws his own lines, observes his own rules: 'The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art ...What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions. Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist'[422]. This is the 'plumb line' of the Hebrew Bible, which measures the depths of a man's heart, and the 'measuring rod' which measures his soul. Blake seeks to articulate precision by way of the outline: 'What does Precision of Pencil[423] mean? If it does not mean Outline it means Nothing'[424]. The outline is what distinguishes one thing from another, something from nothing, the 'within' from the 'without', and all of Blake's visual media rely heavily on his characteristically strong, sinuous and flowing outlines. These preserve his idea of the 'just' city, the delineation of moral rectitude[425]. Blake's principles regarding outline drawing were extended to his worded media, similarly contoured and sculpted for special effect. The long, regular, unrhyming lines Blake uses in many of his longer works recall the Old Testament, especially the Psalms and Isaiah, in the English King James version. Blake may have been influenced by Bishop Robert Lowth's Oxford lectures published in 1753[426]. Mee agrees with this, believing that Blake's versification adapts the 'parallelism' which Robert Lowth

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[419] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the First lines 2-3
[420] Jerusalem Plate 27 'To the Jews' lines 96-7
[421] Jerusalem Plate 3 'To the Public' lines 46-55
[422] Erdman (1988) p550
[423] The eighteenth century word for brush.
[424] Erdman (1988) p657
[425] N Williams (1998) p189
[426] Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (*De sacra poesi Hebraeorum*), translated into English in 1778

had identified as the basis of biblical verse. His poetry seems to be structured around the principle of parallelism[427], in spite of variation in line-length and rhythm. The settings and imagery which Blake uses also echo the prophetic narratives where large historical movements of time and event are described in an apocalyptic way, and time-periods are compressed or elongated, according to requirements. In the Hebrew Bible the earthly and the mundane are always linked with larger cosmic forces which participate in and manipulate human interactions. This is also a consistent feature of Blake's poetry.

Obscurity has been identified as a distinctive feature of prophecy[428], and Lowth believed that its use had a definite rhetorical function, to whet the interest, maintain reader attention, and stimulate the imagination. Blake used obscurity as a rhetorical strategy believing that[429] 'the wisest of the Ancients consider'd what is not too explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act'[430]. Other critics agree, noting that for Lowth, as well as for his contemporaries, biblical pictorialism stimulates precisely because it does not present a clear and distinct picture in its figuralism. Rather, it presents a true imitation of the *mind* in a state of excitement, the picture created within the mind of the reader through his or her own sympathetic response[431]. It is in this way that the techniques of Biblical narrative 'rouze the faculties', and Blake seeks to imitate them in order to provoke passion and response in service of both challenge and change. Blake was aware of the charge of 'obscurity' which was levelled at his works (Palmer writes to Gilchrist on 23rd August 1855: 'His poems were variously estimated. They tested rather severely the imaginative capacity of their readers'[432]), and responds accordingly: 'I had hoped ... you would not reject that Species which give Existence to Every other, namely, Visions of Eternity. You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the idiot is not worth my care'[433].

Within rhetorical and pictorial persuasion, obscurity intact[434], it is reader response which counts. The communication of divine subjects to human subjects achieves its effects through the reader's experience of images in motion rather than through his or her

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[427] Mee (1992) p23
[428] Mee (1992) p25
[429] Erdman (1988) p702
[430] This approach suggests that the Bible 'needed to be read as a poetic document in the light of the reader's active judgement rather than a rigid, sacred authority' Mee (1992) p176 - this promotes 'an active role for the reader in producing the meaning of the text' and has similarities with 'Blake's general desire to 'rouze the faculties to act'' Mee (1992) p176
[431] Tannenbaum (1982) p73
[432] Letter from Samuel Palmer to Alexander Gilchrist, 23 August 1855: Keynes (1980) p177
[433] Letter from Blake to Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799: Keynes (1980) p8
[434] cf 'for prophecy, in its very nature, implies some degree of obscurity' Lowth (1847) p224

contemplation of static pictures[435]. This is because prophetic language must communicate prophetic *action* on the part of the Old Testament prophets as public figures of protest who were involved in the analysis and transmission of history and politics as well as the principles of religion and morals[436]. One eighteenth century critic, Thomas Howes, equated the prophetic office with a radical political stance. For Howes the prophets of the Old Testament were members of the opposition and they figured among the leading patriots of their country who took 'very free, yet necessary liberties in criticising and condemning the measures of their kings, nobles, priests, and people'[437]. Both Howes and Lowth concentrated on the hortatory, rather than the predictive function of prophecy, which was conceived of not as a vision of the future but as an attempt to persuade the people to act in a particular way[438]. This means that, for example, Jeremiah's continual conflict with Zedekiah and the Hebrew religious establishment 'marks him as the epitome of Howes's prophet of opposition'[439]. Howes believed that both in their private and public capacities the Hebrew Bible prophets delivered harangues at different times, designed to be one continued 'metrical oration of admonition'. These were protests delivered in order to be 'preserved for the instruction of succeeding ages, concerning the obstinacy of kings and the infatuation of the people, notwithstanding all the signs of the times'[440].

Blake's deliberated crafted, rhetorical poetry, his 'metrical oration of admonition', was based on a principle of form existing in the Bible that was based not on external rules but on inner coherence. A mixture of styles are used by the biblical poets according to their particular rhetorical purpose. Taking history, poetry, or oratory as building blocks, Blake similarly did not bind himself by chronological or historical order. He created meaning and coherence through a thematic juxtaposition of individual parts. This is Blake's way of protesting against the concept of externally imposing unity upon a work of art. As Coleridge would practise after him, Blake preferred an organic form of poetry that grew its own shape from within. This is true also of biblical poetry, where form is subordinate to significance and content[441], a principle of 'internal coherence' that works against the principles of unity, chronology, and symmetry. Critics of the time were arguing for the presence of art and design in the Old Testament prophetic texts, on the basis of their

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[435] Tannenbaum (1982) p73
[436] Mee (1992) p27
[437] Thomas Howes. Critical Observations on Books, Antient and Modern. Vol II (4 vols) London: Sold by B. White in Fleet Street, 1783. pp214-5; 'Howes ... was not concerned with proving the inspiration of the Hebrew prophecies; his main purpose was to establish the authenticity and the aesthetic integrity of those works' Tannenbaum (1982) p28; 'Howes ... was the only writer to carefully explain the principles of unity underlying the Old Testament prophecies' Tannenbaum (1982) p36
[438] Mee (1992) p27
[439] Mee (1992) p31
[440] Howes (1783) p215
[441] Roston (1965) pp22-24

aesthetic integrity and coherence as identified by Thomas Howes[442]. This point of view de-emphasised the predictive nature of prophecy in order to establish its credibility on the basis of its rhetorical or visionary nature[443].

The reason for both Blake's and the prophets' disregard of normal historical chronological order is that they attempt to portray the history of mankind as a series of wondrous acts whose relationship to one another is thematic rather than causal. Such a concept of history juxtaposes events, things, or persons from different time periods in order to relate them to a central theme or paradigm that transcends *chronos* and causality. This means a typological interpretation is possible in both the Bible and Blake, ensuring that a 'typology of prophetic archetypes' exists, who surface from eternity or *kairos* into the temporal world, to do their job and leave their words before disappearing again, and this binds the 'historical reality' of each of these synchronic figures across time in a diachronic and horizontal typological relationship.

This typological relationship of the 'archetypal' with the 'real' world is also represented within the Bible by way of the juxtaposition of supposedly historical but largely mythical events with the contemporary situation. The unique feature of Hebrew Bible poetry that distinguishes it, is its *anamnesis* of significant events from the past, particularly relating to chaos and the Creation, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom, the exodus from Egypt, and the delivery of the Law at Sinai, appropriated into the present. This fuses a mythical past with a real present, binds the archetypal with the real. The effect of these juxtapositions requires reader participation and an understanding of the significance of past events to contemporary reality[444]. Use of such an *anamnesis* closes distance, closes the gap between perceived past and present, perceived myth and reality, and aims to persuade.

Thomas, Hopkins and Blake, in spite of their differing theological allegiances, believe in the active intervention of God in human history by way of the presence of sacred fire or energy upholding all life: this is the *'Heilsgeschichte'* or the miraculous intervention of God. If we apply typological rhetoric to this, we can distinguish between a perception of

[442] Howes discusses these issues in his article: 'Doubts Concerning the Translation and Notes of the Bishop of London to Isaiah, vindicating Ezekiel, Isaiah, and other Jewish Prophets from Disorder in Arrangement' from Howes (1783)
[443] Howes' critical examination of the prophetic texts convinced him of their originality and inspired composition, and 'opened his eyes' to the 'rational structure and consistent plans of their authors' Howes (1783) p265; he found they utilised two other kinds of order to that of chronologic order, 'and both preferable': 'that of the historic order in which the prophecies were accomplished, and also that oratorical order which might be thought best suited to the purpose of persuasion and argumentation' Howes (1783) pp138-9 - these led to a 'third order of arrangement' which comprised 'a distribution of the several parts as should appear to the authors conducive to the purpose of forcible argumentation' Howes (1783) p149; overall Howes' article seeks to vindicate the prophets from 'disorder in arrangement': *'spiritus propheticus non est spiritus chronologicus' ibid* p137
[444] For a full discussion of these points see Tannenbaum (1982) pp88-97

history as *kairos* (history as a number of moments containing divine and eternal significance[445]) and history as *chronos* (history based upon human clock time). Blake rejects the latter, asserting instead that without the presence of spiritual agency history is meaningless, for it is in effect spiritual agency which turns the world and drives the affairs of man. The Bible incorporates both views, articulating past, present and future simultaneously, mixing tenses in a way that ensures the temporal is transcended. The text itself becomes a meeting point of human history and divine reality, it projects forwards and backwards, and upwards to God, bringing the temporal and the eternal to bear upon the present moment. This aims to promote faith and call man to a new existence through the realization that the Word is eternally present[446]. Blake elucidates this through his use of giant archetypal figures striding over or draped across Britain and the Continent, with his emphasis of the immanence of deity in the quotidian moment and his focus on the 'Minute Particulars'. His vision depends upon an ahistorical conception of contrary forces eternally struggling in time.

The prophet himself is a transhistorical archetype, a typological synchronic representation of a diachronic phenomenon, personifying the reality that types are constantly renewed in the face of historical change[447]. This means that when the 'type' is renewed, and repeats the old message within a new context, continuity is maintained and balance held amid flux and movement. This symbolically illustrates the Bible's central theme as the eternally creative power of God bringing about the miraculous and the totally new at the same time as the 'ancient' and enduring is maintained. This dialectic between transformation and stability, which is expressed through the renewal of the type, is articulated within the Bible and extends outward to poets who have appropriated its forms. The didactic rhetoric of the Bible and of the prophetic texts is directed at the reader, whose interpretation and response through action is required. This means for Blake that biblical rhetorical vision represents the recurrence within time of what eternally exists[448]. Blake's rhetoric of persuasion then, owes a great deal to the didactic tropes of the prophetic texts, and in a way inherits them.

XIV

Within a faithful prophetic vocation that attempts to point the way towards redemption exists acceptance of personal cost. Prophetic mission involves the reality of a Sisyphean

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[445] Tannenbaum quoting Kermode
[446] Tannenbaum (1982) p104
[447] Tannenbaum (1982) p104
[448] See A Vision of the Last Judgement Norton (1979) p409: 'Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably'

endeavour without end or respite. Vaughan observes that most of the larger commercial ventures that Blake undertook failed, usually because his work, although admired by some, was felt to be too strange to appeal to a general audience[449]. Blake was well aware of the esoteric and often difficult nature of both his personality and his visionary endeavours, and in his own lifetime knew himself to be on the periphery of the 'normal', marginalised and displaced from the centre of society which fed itself on materiality and social status:

> O why was I born with a different face
> Why was I not born like the rest of my race
> When I look each one starts! when I speak I offend
> Then I'm silent & passive & lose every Friend
>
> Then my verse I dishonour. My pictures despise
> My person degrade & my temper chastise
> And the pen is my terror. the pencil my shame
> All my Talents I bury, and dead is my Fame
>
> I am either too low or too highly prizd
> When Elate I am Envy'd, When Meek I'm despis'd[450]

Blake uses the personality of Los to articulate the personal cost of faithfulness to vocation, portraying Blake's role as marginalised prophet: 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness'[451]. The work of Los the cosmic blacksmith is presented as being a day-to-day plodding and grinding exercise, yet it is centred on visionary powers and width of perception regarding the meaning and movement of the Universe. However this makes of Los an exile, displaced from community. Los speaks of his 'terrible labours. To beat/These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death/I am inspired: I act not for myself: for Albions sake/I now am what I am: a horror and an astonishment'[452]. This is Blake speaking, knowing people's reactions to him. He was often either ridiculed or shunned.

Blake experienced real inner agony, as did Hopkins, and he utters his cry of dereliction from the pain of an 'edged' and displaced life: 'As a poet [Blake] stands on a level with his peers, yet apart from them – a lonely voice before the dawn'[453]. Blake articulates (through Los) the experience of being prophetic, in terms of the personal cost his faithfulness to a gifted vocation brings: 'O that I could abstain from wrath! O that the Lamb/Of God would look upon me and pity me in my fury'[454]. Blake also articulates the fear attached to being

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[449] Vaughan (1999) p45
[450] Poems From Letters 'To Thomas Butts, 16 August 1803' Complete Poems (1997) p487
[451] See **Figure 1** 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness' Frontispiece All Religions Are One Thames & Hudson (2000) p18
[452] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 8 lines 15-18
[453] W G Robertson's 'Introduction' to Gilchrist (1998) pv
[454] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 7 lines 59-60

the personal medium of God: 'I behold the finger of God in terrors!'[455]. He speaks of his own feelings, of what it is like to be William Blake: 'I begin to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men ... my stupid Melancholy'[456]. Blake was not a Romantic artist for whom a saturnine, melancholic state of mind was a prerequisite for creativity, rather, he refers to 'melancholy' as a condition affecting him like a 'Deep pit', a 'Disease', not a productive force. In opposition to such a state, joyous energy was rather the mainspring of Blake's imagination[457].

Paradoxically, within the pain of edge and displacement, Blake received comfort and security from his engagement with eternal forces: 'his visions of the spirits, or angels, who surrounded him night and day ... marked the continuing presence of a childhood vision ... they afforded him a sense of security or of being effectively 'singled out''[458]. In this way, Blake felt supported in his radical, exiled stance. He differs markedly from artists operating within the elitist *avant-garde* system of today, because the *avant-garde* has become the artistic establishment, independent endeavour and originality being used as market ploys. Blake, however, in his day was a genuine outsider[459]: 'I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyd & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity. See Visions, Dream Dreams, & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals'[460]. Blake's spiritual experiences and convictions were his armour against others' narrowness of mind, and against the society from which he was largely excluded, and they preserve his faithfulness to vocation, in the face of cost. Blake believed that all he did was in service of both God and God-in-man: 'The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius'[461]. Only in this way could he continue to operate as a living conscience and a voice of honest indignation that was also the voice of God[462].

Blake's office of spokesman was a painful burden that weighed on him spiritually: 'I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven Daily & Nightly but the nature of such things is not as some suppose. without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand & left behind the sea of time & space roars & follows swiftly he who keeps not right onward

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[455] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 12 line 5
[456] Erdman (1988) p706: letter to Cumberland July 1800; cf also Thomas: 'R S Thomas's melancholy is derived not from self-doubt and a sense of personal inadequacy but from a distaste for much in the world around him, and from a bleak recognition of how far man falls from the state of grace' Poetry Wales (Spring 1972) p103
[457] Tate Gallery (2000) p169
[458] Peter Ackroyd, Tate Gallery (2000) p12
[459] Vaughan (1999) p74
[460] Erdman (1988) p728: letter to Butts April 25, 1803
[461] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 21 'A Memorable Fancy'
[462] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy'

is lost & if our footsteps slide in clay how can we do otherwise than fear & tremble. but I should not have troubled You with this account of my spiritual state'[463]. Blake may have been 'under the direction of Messengers from Heaven' but he, along with the ancient prophets, was not in a position to refuse such agency: 'if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels & tremble at the Tasks set before us. if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts. because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! - I too well remember the Threats I heard! - If you who are organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual communion. Refuse & bury your Talent in the Earth even tho you should want Natural Bread. Sorrow & Desperation pursues you thro life! & after death shame & confusion of face to eternity'. A burden of pain and compulsion, then, attends faithfulness to vocation. Ackroyd underlines this, commenting that some will discern enough pathos and sorrow in William Blake's life to justify calling it a tragedy, but that was not how it seemed to Blake. He saw his life as one of energetic vision embodied and art made alive[464]. As if to corroborate this, Blake asserts, 'Yet I laugh and sing, for if on Earth neglected I am in heaven a Prince among Princes, & even on Earth beloved by the Good as a Good Man'[465]. Blake saw himself as a good man, a true man, wherein the spirit of prophecy resided, evincing the egotism and megalomania of the prophetic and the bardic through the self-portrait of the artist, Los. Los is portrayed as the 'Eternal Prophet', not a self-assured cosmic spectator, but a tormented figure, afflicted by internal strife and fettered with a 'Chain of Jealousy'[466]. Blake articulates such torment in 'Mad Song': 'Lo! to the vault/Of paved heaven,/With sorrow fraught/My notes are driven ... For light doth seize my brain/With frantic pain'. The pathetic fallacy in this poem shows the natural tempest as a corollary for the storm inside; the speaker like a 'fiend in a cloud' wants to go after night and eschew the day because it hurts him. Yet in other places, the night becomes the enemy, and day as 'The Golden Net' is yearned for: 'Underneath the Net I stray/Now intreating Burning Fire/Nor intreating Iron Wire/Now intreating Tears & Sighs/O when will the morning rise'. This is a portrayal of the darkest hour before the dawn, which Hopkins also knew.

The story of Blake's life can be seen as that of 'a man living in poverty for his vision and persisting despite the near total neglect of his contemporaries'[467]. He may have been entirely an individualist who saw himself as being 'out of step with his time'[468], yet Blake was profoundly of his time, immersed in its character and events, engaged with its

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[463] Erdman (1988) p724: letter to Butts Jan 10, 1803
[464] Peter Ackroyd: Tate Gallery (2000) p13
[465] Keynes (1980) p69: Blake to William Hayley, 7 October 1803
[466] Mitchell (1978) p113; 'Chain of Jealousy' see The [First] Book of Urizen Chapter VII
[467] Vaughan (1999) p6
[468] Vaughan (1999) p7

problems and inequities. In the early 1780's, Blake was appropriated by certain liberal intellectuals of the day. He often attended the salon of Mrs Mathew, a celebrated bluestocking; however, his strangeness began to upset and tire people and support drifted away[469]. Society circles may have found Blake difficult, but he probably found them equally difficult, judging them shallow, frivolous, and annoying, due to their lack of vision and understanding, their lives orientated towards the immediately satisfying and the material. This would have no doubt have left Blake both exasperated and frustrated. One can imagine that this might have goaded him into making his own behaviour worse, happy to retreat into singularity and marginalisation due to the power, strength, and depth of his own involvement with the processes of Eternity. Blake's marginalisation was to an extent, self-imposed, as was the marginalisation of Hopkins and Thomas, who also chose vocations which would displace them into arenas of endeavour and activity which were not available, or even comprehensible, to all. Blake's view of others can only be surmised, but one irritated yet playful comment (among many others in his satirical verses and epigrams) stands out:

> The only Man that eer I knew
> Who did not make me almost spew
> Was Fuseli he was both Turk and Jew
> And so dear Christian Friends how do you do[470]

Blake's faithfulness to vision and vocation came at personal cost; however, the fact that we are still reading and pondering Blake's works, looking with not a little wonder at them, means he did nothing in vain even although he was neither fully appreciated nor understood in his lifetime. The adulation of 'The Ancients' in his later years was a great comfort to him, and Blake also had his supporters who were fellow artists and publishers, or modest gentlemen with rather eccentric tastes; the sculptor John Flaxman was his friend, also the painter John Linnell. Thomas Butts, a minor civil servant, provided Blake with a constant source of employment for nearly 20 years from 1797 onwards. Similarly, William Hayley, minor poet and minor gentleman, provided Blake with patronage. It is said that Blake died 'singing of the things he saw in Heaven' in August 1827, a few months before his seventieth birthday. Despite ill-health, his last years were his most tranquil. Although Blake's worldly success was limited, he must have been satisfied, knowing that he had remained faithful and true to his inner vision despite decades of personal privation and public opposition[471].

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[469] Vaughan (1999) p23
[470] Erdman (1988) p507
[471] Vaughan (1999) p72

XV

This chapter has sought to analyse the ways in which Blake's work fulfils the proposed criteria for being prophetic. Blake believed that prophets, in the modern sense of the word, have never existed. Jonah was no prophet 'in the modern sense', for his prophecy of Nineveh failed. In opposition to this predictive view of what prophecy means, Blake proposes that every honest man is a Prophet, able to 'forthtell' or utter an opinion on both private and public matters. Prediction really means that for every action there is a reaction: 'If you go on So, the result is So'[472].

Blake's version of 'the prophetic' comprises energy as eternal delight, as an inherent part of life wherein nothing is static and all is flux. He tells us to 'Expect poison from the standing water'[473], for unmoving water becomes stagnant and contaminated until 'A black water accumulates'[474]. Black water means disease because it is rank and sour. In this way, a man who never alters his opinion 'is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind'[475]. This is why Blake's bardic, prophetic duty is to 'stain the water clear' with his 'rural pen'[476], in order that we can be cleansed, refreshed and renewed, and in this way made moving and active, for the 'cistern' merely contains and can be cracked and broken, allowing the precious water to drain away[477]. In contrast to this state, 'the fountain overflows'[478], providing moving, living water that is healthy and energetic. Blake illustrates this in 'Dante in the Empyrean, Drinking at the River of Light' where the River of Divine Imagination flows from Eternity to refresh the poet, and Blake in his turn provides us with his own flow of cleansed and moving water, his spiritual fountain of words and images at which our minds and hearts can drink.

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[472] 'Oxford Standard Authors Blake' OSAB: 'Blake: Complete Writings', with Variant Readings. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. London: Oxford Standard Authors, 1966. New impression with corrections, Oxford Paperbacks (1971) p392

[473] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 9

[474] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 line 10

[475] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 19 line 8-9

[476] 'Introduction' to Songs of Innocence

[477] 'cracked cisterns that can hold no water' Jer 2:13

[478] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 8 line 17; cf also Thomas's description in Auto (1997) of the day he watched a tree silently shedding its leaves in autumn like a continuous fountain; also 'The God' in Experimenting (1986): I AM simply: 'The God' 'Who Is' – 'whose mind/is its own fountain, who/overflows'; cf 'A Thicket In Lleyn' *ibid*: 'the fountain/of the imagination, endlessly/replenishing itself out of its own waters'; cf Hopkins: 'All day long I like fountain flow From thy hand out' from 'Thee, God, I come from, to thee go' Gardner (1967) No 155 p194; cf also John 7: 37-39: 'As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'. Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive'; cf Plato: the creative force is 'like a fountain which gives free course to the rush of its waters' Collected Dialogues (1961) 'Laws IV' 719c p1310; cf Shelley: 'All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all is divine effluence which their peculiar relations enabled them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight' Defense (1891) p33

Blake wants us to perceive the extent to which we are limited by life. He posits Urizen as a polar opposite to Los, the former personifying the limitations of reason and downward vision, the concept of ratio; the latter personifying the illimitable imagination, upward and outward vision, the concept of infinity. If we can see the infinite in life, rather than the ratio, then we will see God: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite'[479]. However, we are blinkered by ratio, 'For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern'. Blake, in opposition to man's propensity for blindness and narrowness, wants us to perceive Jehovah before, behind, above, beneath, around[480], open to our view if we but look correctly. He wants to restore our relationship, our covenant, with God.

Above all, it is the 'Minute Particulars' which should concern us, the smallest acts in the smallest moments. Blake believed that individual contributions matter, that how we live our lives and treat one another may be what make us human, but they also enable us to become divine: 'he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole/Must see it in its Minute Particulars'[481]. The perfect whole is only as whole as the sum of its parts are joined. We should *labour* 'at the furrow' because 'It is better to prevent misery, than to release from misery/It is better to prevent error, than to forgive the criminal:/Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones:/And those who are in misery cannot remain so long/If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth'[482].

Blake warned that every man will be 'Judged/By his own Works', and the bedrock of his belief system is that 'He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars/General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer'[483]. A general haze of good intentions will not suffice. Blake is saying that all of us have a duty to attend to each other as well as to ourselves in order to take personal responsibility for the way the world turns. If any are in misery, it is our own personal fault. Blake believed that the establishment of truth depended on the continual destruction of Falsehood, on continual 'circumcision'[484]. This involves a 'Mental Fight' over our interior selves, our spiritual, mental, emotional, and intellectual parts. We must 'put off' selfhood: inward-looking selfishness and self-centred concerns. We must organise ourselves so that we are attentive to the weaker and more vulnerable members of our society, ensuring that equality exists, not inequality; that freedom exists, not oppression; that opportunity exists, not exploitation.

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[479] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 14 line 14-15
[480] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 49 line 53
[481] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 91 lines 20-21
[482] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 55 lines 48-53
[483] Jerusalem *ibid* lines 57-61
[484] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 55 lines 65-66

One might call this today a striving after socialist principles, except that for Blake 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion'[485].

[485] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 57 line 10

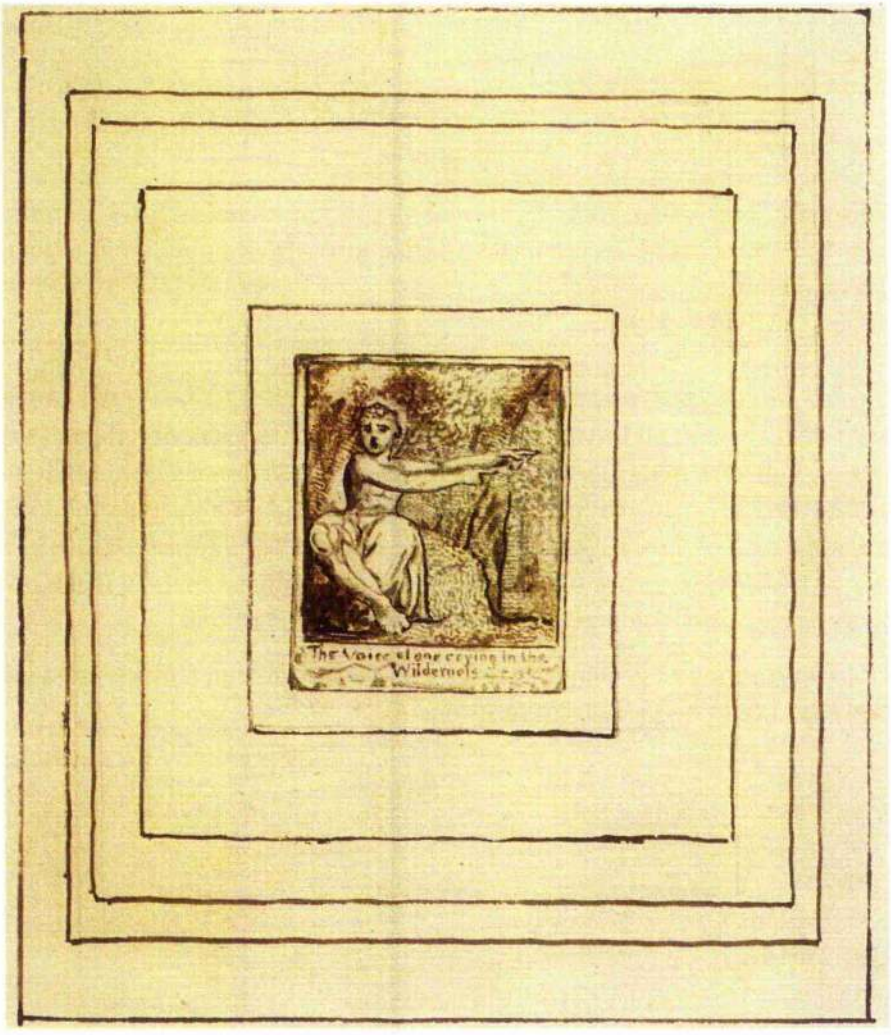

Figure 1

'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness'

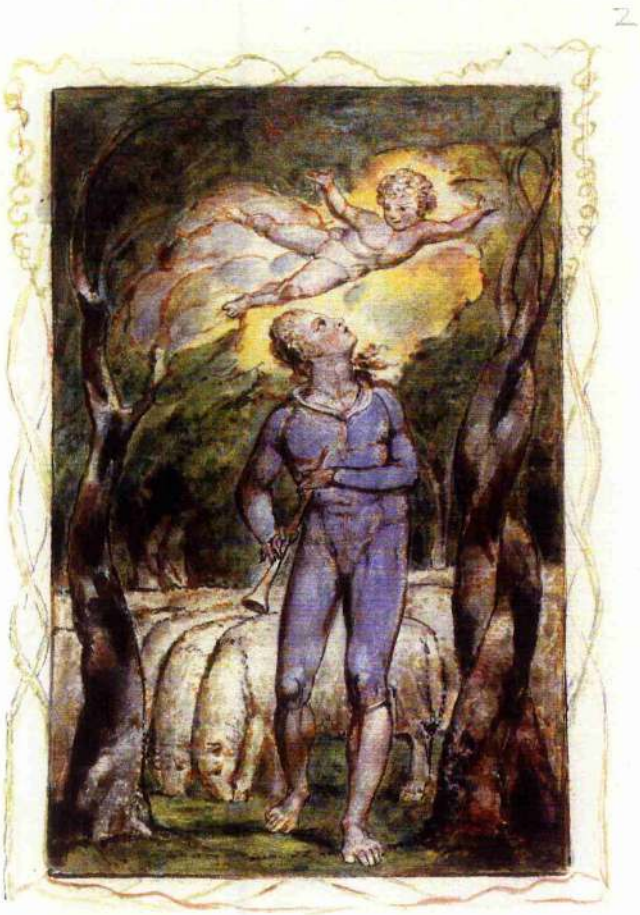

Figure 2

Songs of Innocence Frontispiece

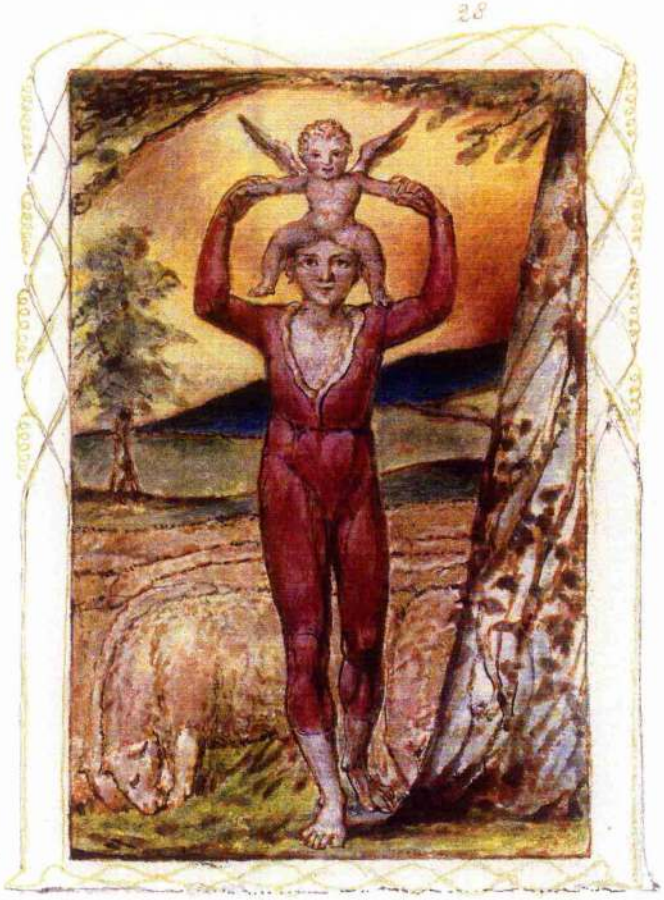

Figure 3

Songs of Experience Frontispiece

[72]

This is Man's Portion, while no more than Man:
Hope, of all Paſſions, moſt befriends us *Here*;
Paſſions of prouder Name befriend us leſs;
Joy has her *Tears*; and *Tranſport* has her *Death*;
Hope, like a Cordial, innocent, tho' ſtrong,
Man's Heart, at once, *inſpirits*, and *ſerenes*;
Nor makes him pay his Wiſdom for his Joys;
'Tis All, our Preſent State can *ſafely* bear,
Health to the Frame! and Vigour to the Mind!
And to the modeſt Eye *chaſtis'd* Delight!
Like the fair Summer-Evening, mild, and Sweet!
'Tis Man's full Cup; his Paradiſe Below!
A bleſt Hereafter, *then*, or Hop'd, or Gain'd,
Is All;—our *Whole* of Happineſs: Full Proof,
I choſe no trivial, or inglorious *Theme*.
And know, ye Foes to Song! (well-meaning Men,
Tho' quite forgotten * Half your *Bible*'s Praiſe)
Important Truths, in Spite of *Verſe*, may pleaſe:
Grave Minds you praiſe; nor can you praiſe too much;
If there is Weight in an ETERNITY,
Let the *Grave* liſten;—and be *graver* ſtill.

* The Poetical Parts of it.

F I N I S.

Figure 4

Edward Young's Night Thoughts Night VII page72

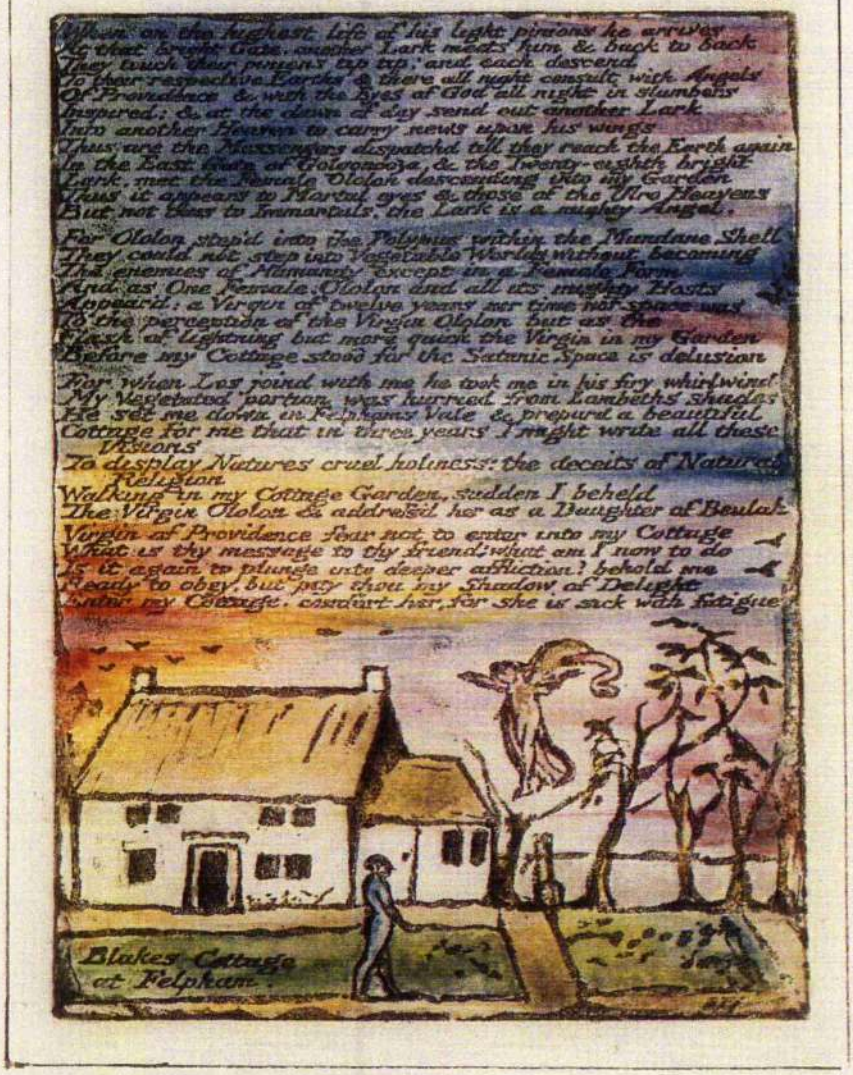

Figure 5

'Blake's Cottage at Felpham'

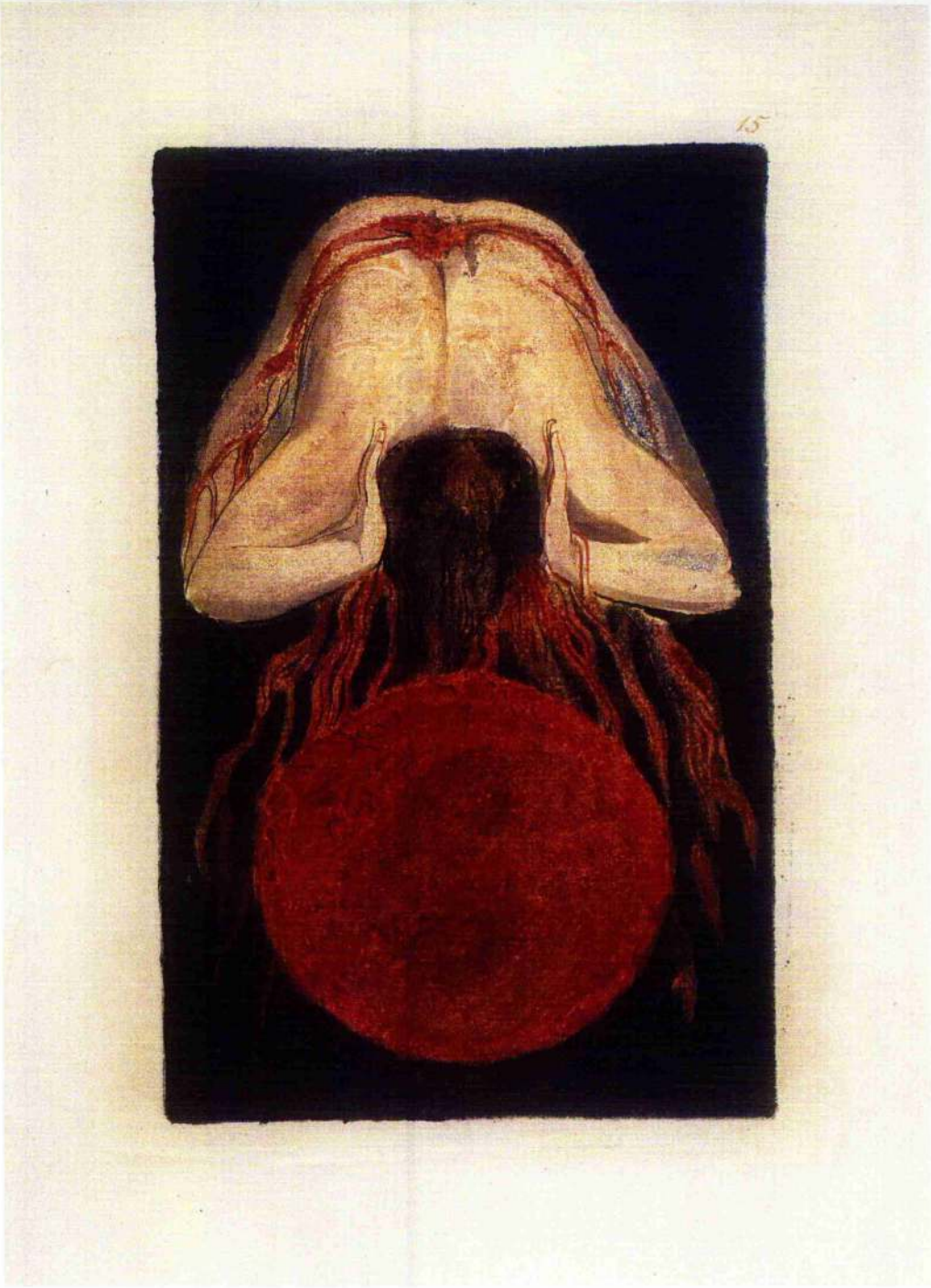

Figure 6

'The death-image of Urizen'

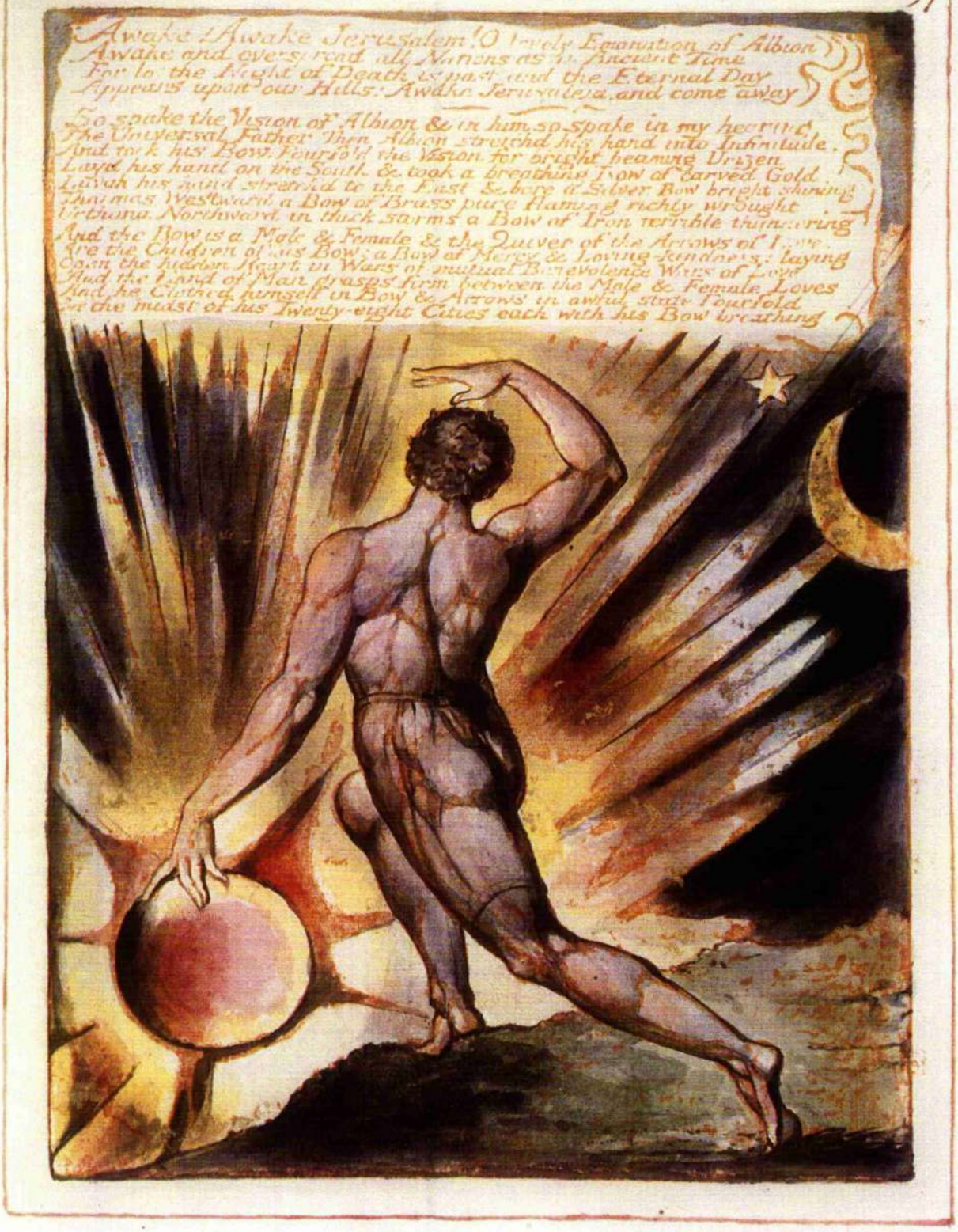

Figure 7

'Los with the Sun'

Figure 8

The [First] Book of Urizen Title Page Plate 1

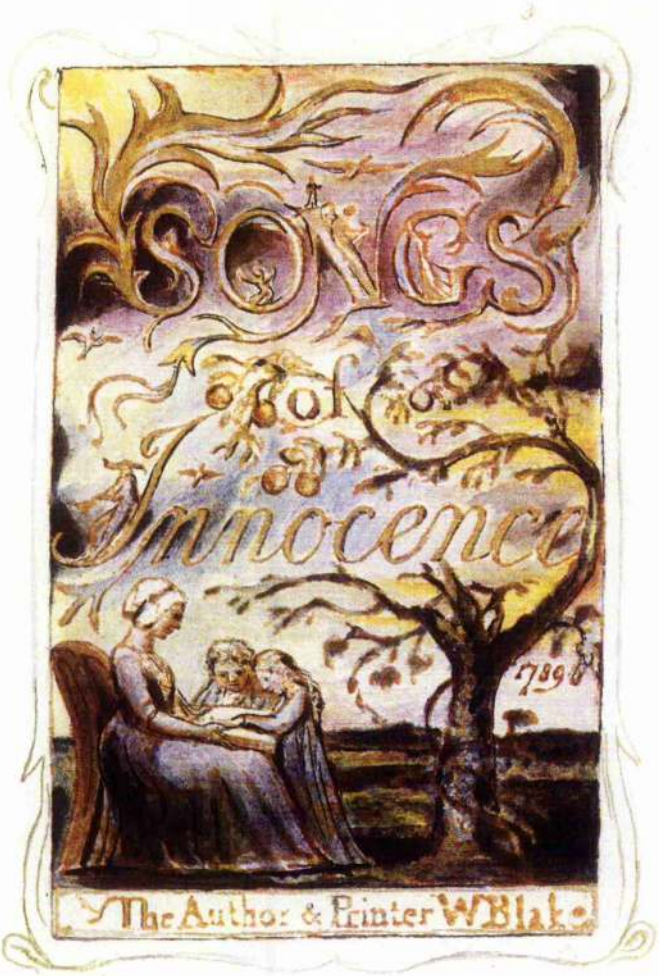

Figure 9

Songs of Innocence Title Page

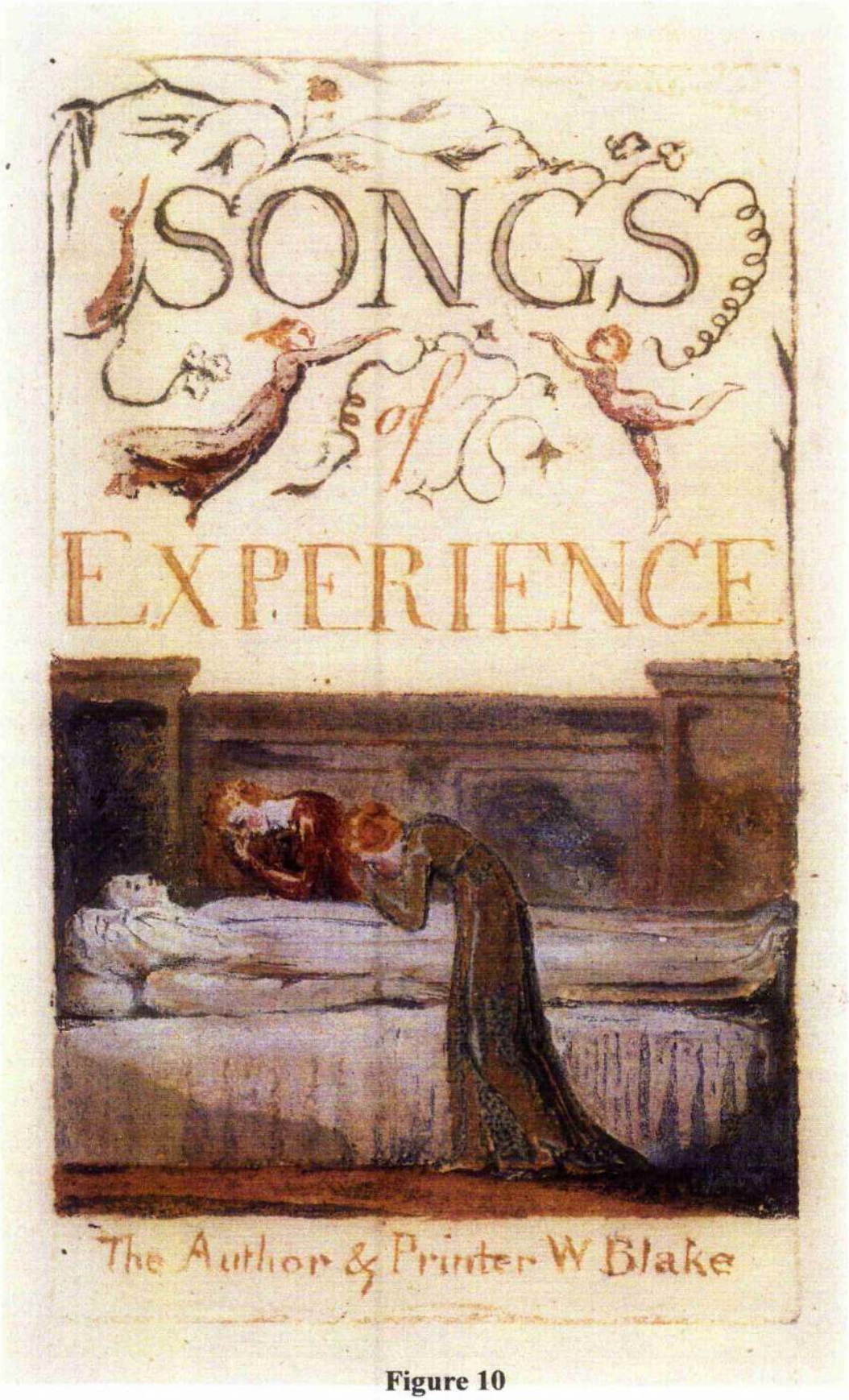

Figure 10

Songs of Experience Title Page

Figure 11

'The Voice of the Ancient Bard'

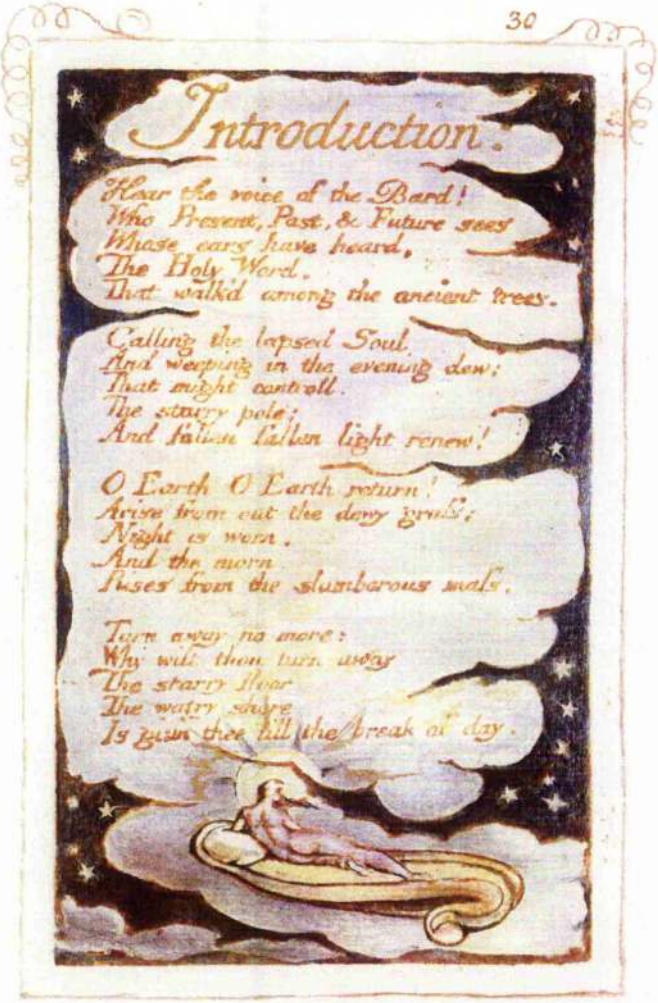

Figure 12

Songs of Experience 'Introduction'

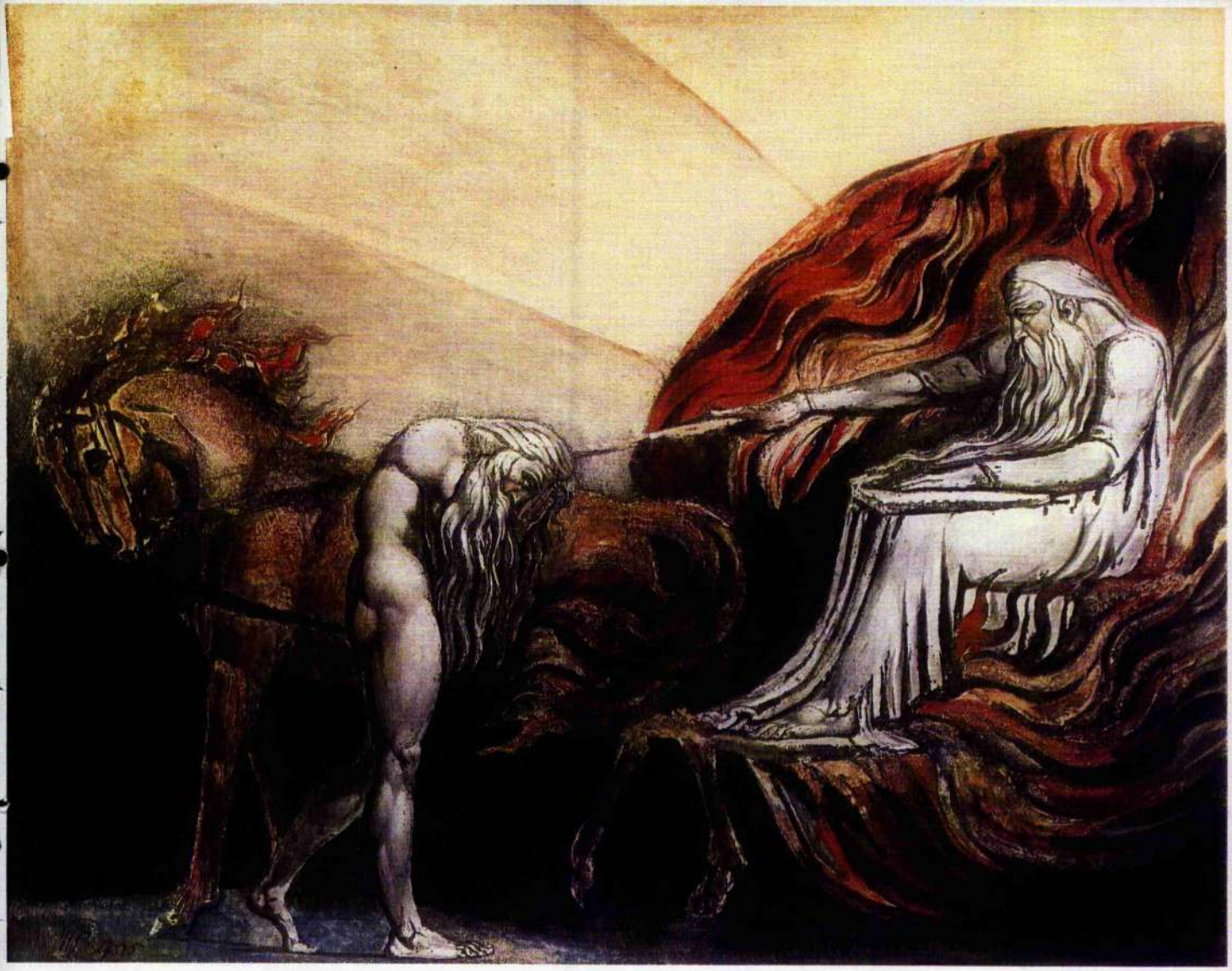

Figure 13

'God Judging Adam'

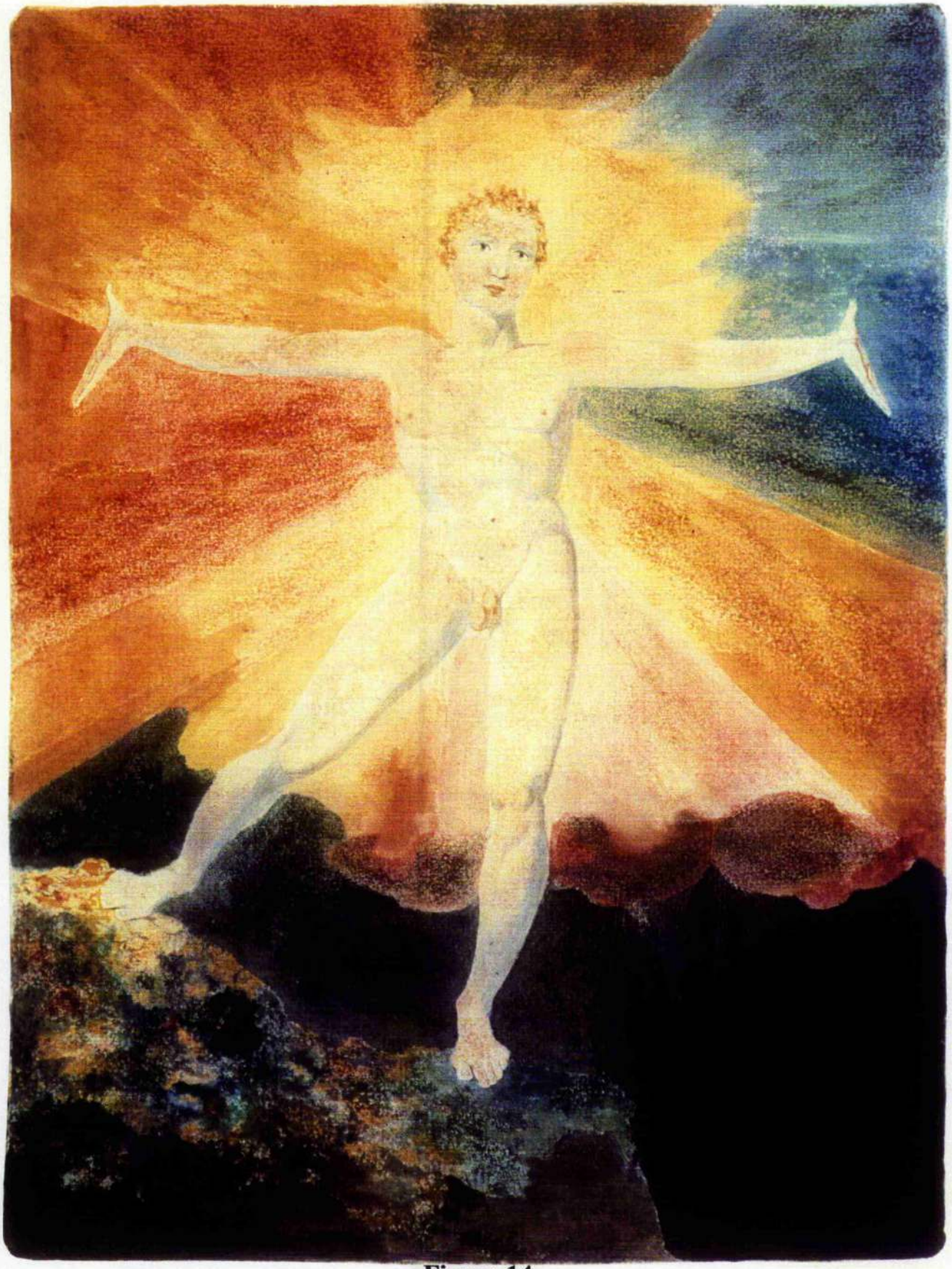

Figure 14
'Albion Rose'

Figure 15
'The Ancient of Days'

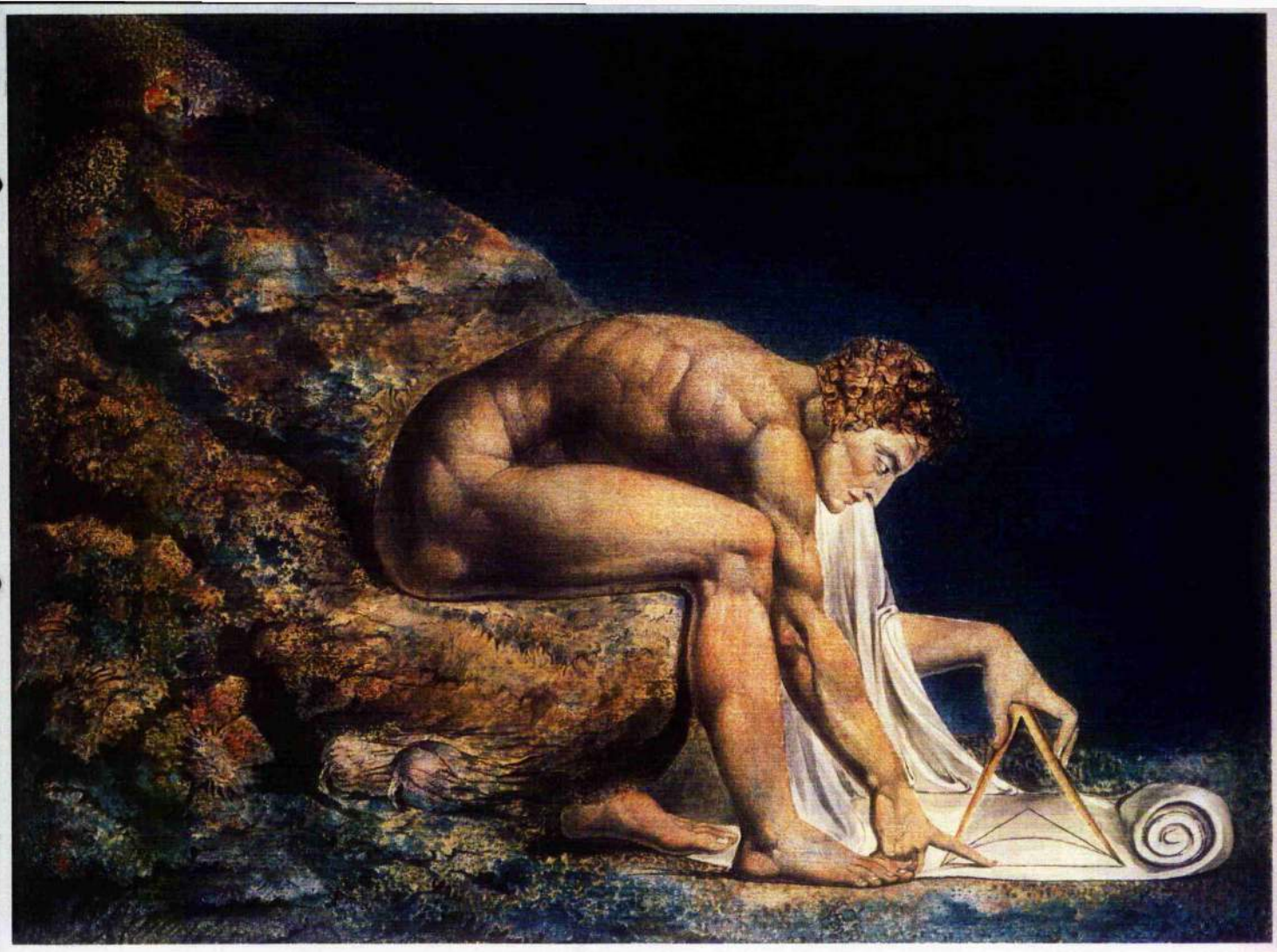

Figure 16

'Newton'

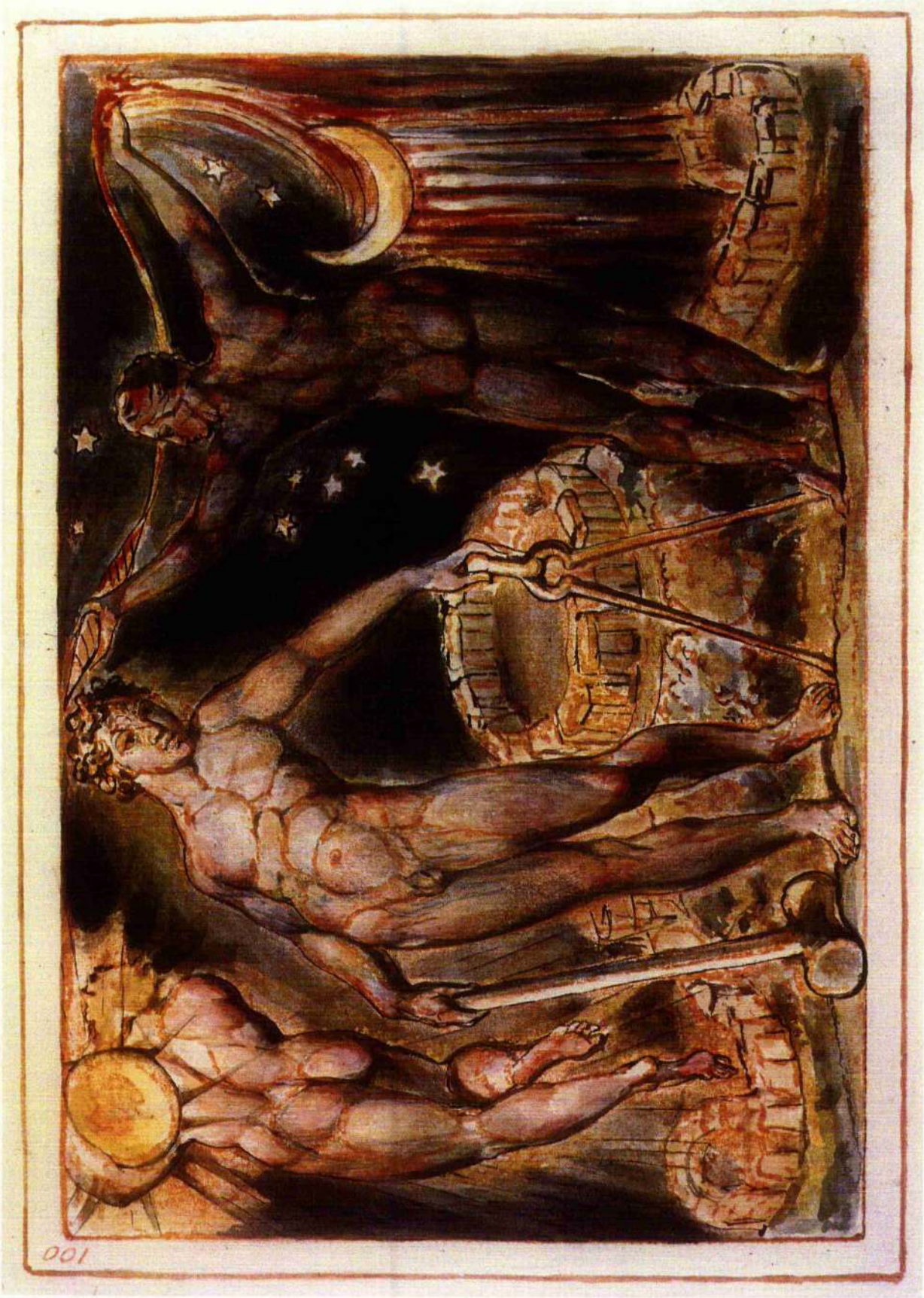

Figure 17
'Los, his Spectre and Enitharmon before a Druid Temple'

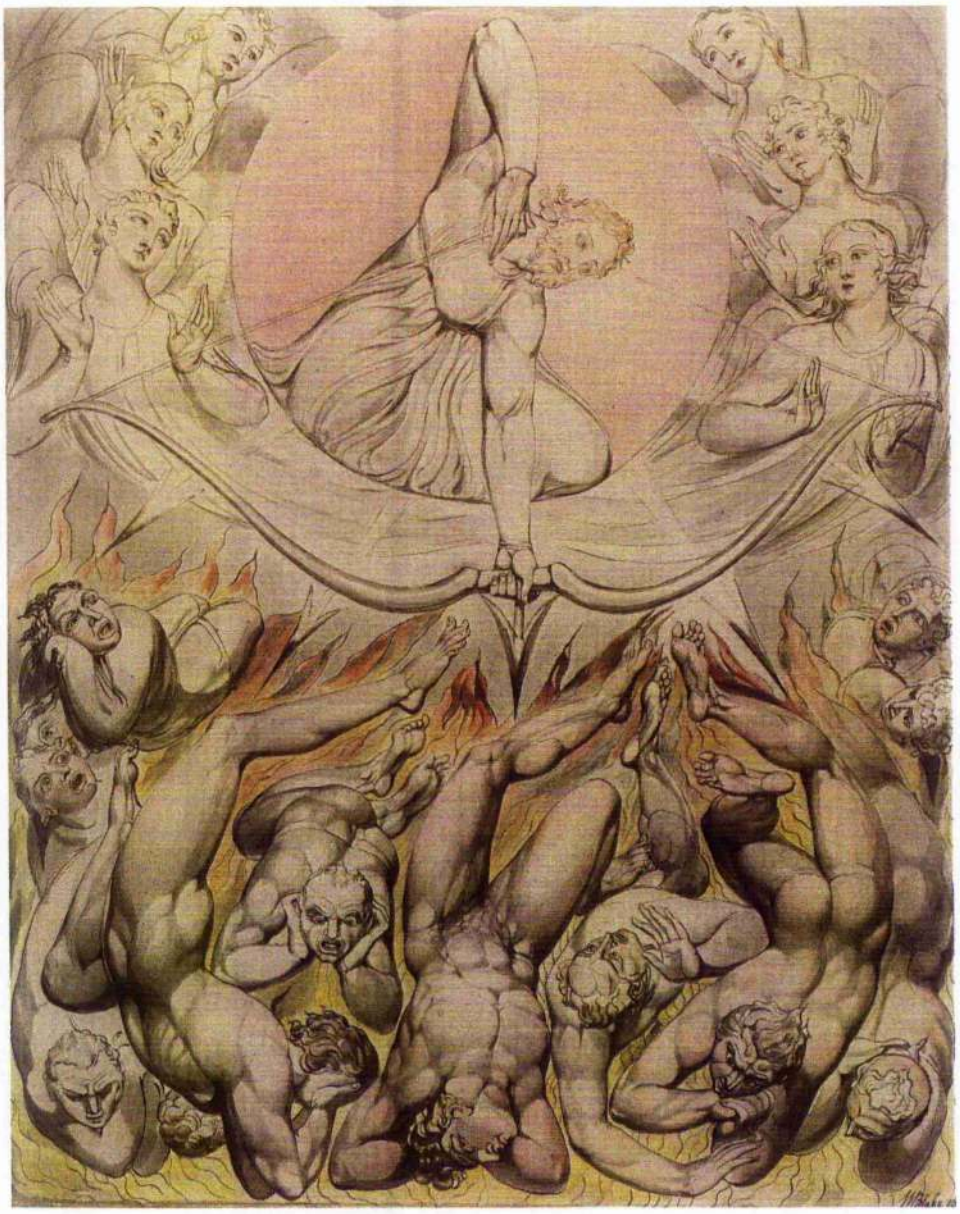

Figure 18

'The Rout of the Rebel Angels'

Bath, mild Physician of Eternity, mysterious power,
Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledge infinite.
Hereford, ancient Guardian of Wales, whose hands
Builded the mountain palaces of Enon, stupendous works!
Lincoln, Durham & Carlisle, Councellors of Los,
And Ely, Scribe of Los, whose pen no other hand
Dare touch: Oxford, immortal Bard! with eloquence
Divine, he wept over Albion, speaking the words of God
In mild perswasion: bringing leaves of the tree of Life.

Thou art in Error Albion, the Land of Ulro:
One Error not removd, will destroy a human Soul.
Repose in Beulah's night, till the Error is removd
Reason not on both sides. Repose upon our bosoms
Till the Plow of Jehovah, and the Harrow of Shaddai
Have passed over the Dead, to awake the Dead to Judgment.
But Albion turnd away refusing comfort.

Oxford trembled while he spoke then Fainted in the arms
Of Norwich, Peterboro, Rochester, Chester awful, Worcester.
Litchfield, Saint Davids, Landaff, Asaph, Bangor, Sodor:
Bowing their heads devoted: and the Furnaces of Los
Began to raze, thundering loud the storms began to roar
Upon the Furnaces, and loud the Furnaces rebellow beneath.

And these the Four in whom the twenty-four appeard four-fold:
Verulam, London, York, Edinburgh, mourning one towards another
Alas! ——The time will come, when a mans worst enemies
Shall be those of his own house and family: in a Religion
Of Generation, to destroy by Sin and Atonement, holy Jerusalem.
The Bride and Wife of the Lamb. O God thou art Not an Avenger

Figure 19
'Albions sleep'

Figure 20

'To Tirzah'

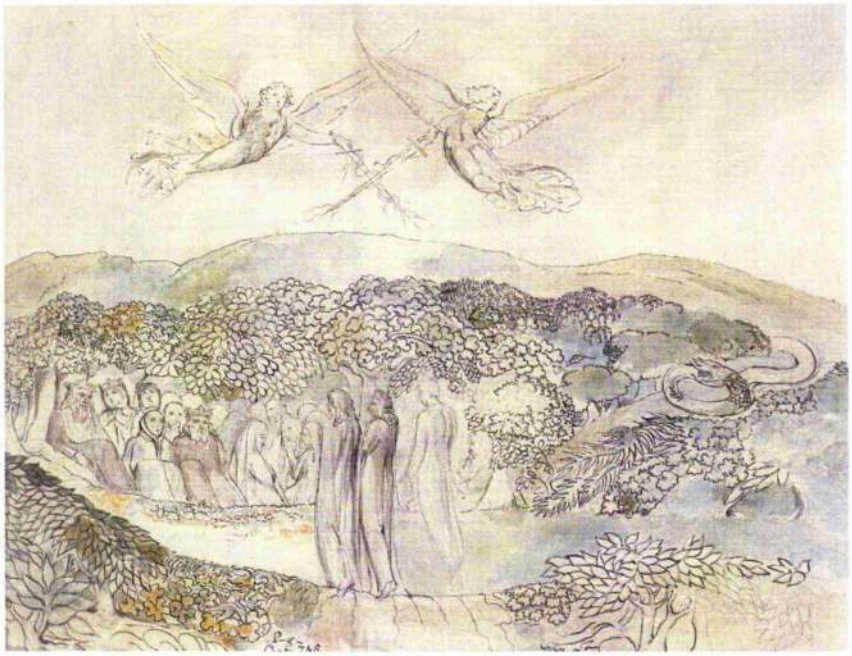

Figure 21

'The Lawn with the Kings and Angels'

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Didactic Imperatives

For scoundrels are found among my people;
they take over the goods of others.
Like fowlers they set a trap;
they catch human beings.
Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of treachery;
therefore they have become great and rich,
they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;
they do not judge with justice
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the LORD,
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?[1]

'Don't think even the dirt/And the brute ugliness reigned/Unchallenged'[2]

Gleckner has observed that 'The quasi-generic term 'prophecy' has often been used rather loosely to mean a poem in which there are strange names and confused action. It warrants more precise definition'[3]. Mee concurs, claiming that there exists just such a common and loosely-formed view of what 'prophecy' means, saying of Blake in particular that he 'is often described as a prophet, but the formal implications of the title are rarely examined'[4]. As was discussed in the Introduction, several writers apply the title of Prophet to poets without discussing why they do so. It has been the aim of this thesis to identify and examine the essential characteristics of prophetic activity. Using the criteria established in Chapter Two, it has been possible to discuss in what ways and to what extent the works of Hopkins, Thomas, and Blake exhibit and contain elements of the prophetic.

However, there are, firstly, very obvious ways in which these writers are dissimilar, particularly in their ideologies. Hopkins was a 19th century poet writing out of a clear theological position. His Scholastic intellectual training as a Jesuit was Christocentric,

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[1] Jeremiah 5: 26-29
[2] Thomas 'The Cry' from Selected (1973) p57 [in Poetry (1958)]
[3] Gleckner (1959) p204
[4] Mee (1992) p20

offering the human and divine in the one person of Christ. He saw Christ as being enacted in human lives and in nature: the incarnational cosmic Christ or *Christus victor*. As a Catholic, he was a poet of aesthetic and sensuous religiosity deeply at odds with, for example, the gauntness of Thomas's Lutheran qualities. For Hopkins the concept of sacrifice was paramount, but a sacrifice bound-up with praise or *sacrum facere* - to make sacred by the giving of a gift. The concept of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible differs from this; for Hopkins it meant understanding the nature of God and God's redemptive work through the sacramental nature of the eucharist - God doesn't want sacrifice of bulls but rather a penitent heart. Hopkins as Victorian Englishman had a strained and oblique relationship to his contemporary society because of his conversion to Catholicism, similarly in Ireland where he opposed Irish Nationalism. His poetry is Scotist in its mediation of the concepts of 'selving', '*haecceitas*' etc, Hopkins as martyr enacting the Christ-like - the act of poetic creation being one of negative capability. Hopkins attempted to achieve personal perfection through a rigorous *ascesis*.

Hebraic prophetic writings are concerned with changing the behaviour of the people and bringing them back to a covenantal relationship with God; their force is not that of conversion. Looking back to historical promises, the Hebrews perceived the current day as resting upon history[5] - historical events were seen as theological and theocratic, nothing imagined outside the relationship with God. Hebrew prophets were adversarial, and warned of the inherent dangers of the people being fixated on 'the temple of the lord' rather than on conscious good works. Working within the theological contexts of exile or restoration, most prophetic belief rested solidly on the invulnerability of Zion. The prophets appealed to true worship comprising ethics in public life and the life of the community. Different types of prophets emerged, from early ecstatic prophets to prophetic schools/communities, then to 9th century Elijah & Elisha emerging as distinctive individuals and men of action. They were not writing prophets but were nonetheless powerful individuals. Classical 'writing' prophets from Amos onwards were neither part of institutional prophetic schools nor part of the official priesthood - they worked independently, marginalised and displaced.

Blake's works show anger and zeal. He loathes the church, is anti-clerical, anti-establishment. Blake was neither specifically Scholastic nor Anglican but was influenced by Swedenborg and advocated the active and free practice of religion outwith the confines of institution. His theological position was not ecclesiastical but was, rather, idiosyncratic

[5] See Micah 6: 3-5

with a visionary handling of concepts. Blake was concerned with ethics, visions of Eternity in the present, visions of apocalypse, and allegories of the human soul. For him the Fall and Creation were the same thing - the Fall a creative event, creating life. In this sense he was a radical Christian, and a prophet by way of his iconoclasm and his anti-authoritarian stance. Jerusalem was for him a vision of renewal. He advocated freedom from imprisonment, whether that be of mind or body. Blake wrote in relation to biblical tradition, the biblical canon, and conversed with the Prophets as an equal. His visions of London open-up spaces everywhere and nowhere - London representative of all potentially just cities.

Thomas was a Welsh nationalist and a priest in the Anglican/Lutheran tradition. His theology was a theology of the cross with a suffering-servant alignment, the cross as symbol and sacrament of suffering. His was a stripped religion, one of austerity and bareness, based on the 39 Articles which had been designed to contradict Rome. As a liturgical poet, his preaching is fundamental to his protestantism which favours preaching over the sacraments, whereas in the Catholic tradition the sacrament/mass takes precedence. Thomas mediates his poetry through the liturgy, and he finds his church in nature. His struggle was a pastoral one, as misunderstood parish priest. He saw his various parishes as small universes comprising ideas of nationhood. In this sense, he tried to 'save' the chosen people from a foreign invader, the English.

Ideas of 'God' differ for all of these writers. For Amos, as a Hebrew Bible prophet, his God is the God of covenant; for Blake God is an apophatic/mystical source who turns the universe with huge hands; for Hopkins God is both masterful and jesuitical; for Thomas God is absent and silent, ultimately elusive. There is here a shifting referent for God - the voice of the 'other' only exists within contexts of textuality, the text itself as medium; God for these writers is a God of text, as a character within Job or Genesis 22. They provide our access to God by way of differing and highly complex texts which attempt to create friction, unease, but ultimately reaction. The text itself becomes the experience of God, an incarnational event. In this sense the text also invents the self of the writer - the poet/prophet becomes a construct of voices, whose effect is to make something happen.

Antithesis gives way to synthesis: the above diversities giving unity to the concept of the prophetic, unity achieved through diversity. Prophecy is ultimately about seeing beyond

appearance to what actually is[6] and this provides continuity and universality of prophetic voice. The prophetic voice is a mediated voice, empowered by a prophetic muse and channelled through the characteristics of prophetic activity as proposed in Chapter Two. The first criterion was vocation and individuality, the loss of self-consciousness which releases a powerful character, vocation removing the individual. Hiddenness of self in and for vocation means a calling to allow the self to be used as paradigm for the insight of others - the self as lens which refracts ideas, beliefs, truths, actions, the self as sign of the times, and sign to the times. Hopkins attempts to vanquish the self in order to give up his life to God. He tries to do this physically, intellectually and emotionally, the element of control over his inclinations and desires the most important component of his daily regimen. His call to poetry is alternately denied and embraced, his ambivalence based on the belief that the true way of serving God is as priest not as poetic mouthpiece. His interior war led eventually to fragmentation of self and vocation, the Dublin sonnets testifying to inner agony and realisation of failure in exterior life.

Thomas speaks from different selves: as man, priest, poet, prophet, husband, father, son, experienced through a nomadic and changing life, and these compare with the multiple speaking 'voices' of Jeremiah. He waits for God to speak to him; for Thomas the meaning is in the waiting[7] and meaning is not in having but trying[8]. The fracturing of Thomas comes in the progression of vocation, as he goes up the green lane to visit his parishioners, but is continually foiled and disappointed by their blankness of mind and their stubborn allegiance to the elemental qualities of Wales. He comes down the darkened lane, and feels the cross warp in his hands, his religion and his faith warped and even broken by his parishioners' intransigence and his own feeling of inutility.

Blake's fragmentation is apparent through the multiple viewpoints he presents of himself as poet and prophet, as if he had a series of mirrors around him reflecting his face. Blake represents himself within vocation, as, variously, Los, Rintrah, Milton, Taliesin, Jesus, Elijah, and in one 'memorable fancy' sits down with Isaiah and Ezekiel making himself their equal. Blake is the ancient bard, alive and well in the present. In this way, his vocation transcends historical time and he is, like the biblical prophets before him, simultaneously *vox populi* and *vox dei*[9].

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[6] See Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos etc for different symbolic visions which comprise surface meaning but 'mean' something different

[7] 'Kneeling' from Flowers (1968)

[8] 'Afon Rhiw' from Mass (1992)

[9] See Chapter 5 p205, also Chapter 2 p26 for a discussion of this.

The Hebrew Bible prophets existed as representatives of belief, as holders of an office before Yahweh. The texts concentrate on how the prophet acted with respect to his calling and the authority of his commission, rather than who in reality that prophet, *qua* man, was - there is little or no biographical detail. Some prophets held hereditary office within the *cultus* and their vocations did not give rise to any texts, whereas the charismatic individualism of prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, operating outwith sanctioned institutions, who were oral, energetic, bardic in their communication of wisdom to the people, have left behind them a written legacy[10]. Vocation and individualism are prerequisite component parts of prophetic vocation, a necessary schism out of which the voice of God can be mediated through the individual man, and the will of God progressed through his actions.

The sense of a given vocation was a difficult experience for the prophets, often involving a struggle with God as much as the self, but their call and commissioning came with the clarity of an event. The prophetic call meant the abandoning of a normal life and striking-out on one's own in opposition to formal structures and institutions. Amos had such a commissioning, the Lord taking him as he followed the flock, with the command to 'go, prophesy' to the people. This removes the prophet from community and exiles him to an alienated and alienating edge, displacing him into wilderness territory from where he can speak. Hopkins' call to the priesthood, and his commissioning to a poetics of sacrifice and praise, is bound up with the idea of authority and mastery from without, from a God who directs Hopkins' life and will. He chose a life of marginalisation within a rigorously ascetic Jesuit Order which few would know anything about. He found himself eventually 'at third remove' in Ireland, alienated even from those around him. This life of solitude and singularity, out of which Hopkins uttered critical truths about life and nature, affected him deeply in terms of physical health and spiritual drouth.

As with Hopkins, Thomas's commissioning to priesthood and poetry was pastoral in orientation within rural communities where he was called to ministry and mission by tending the sick[11], dealing with the rites and grief of death[12], taking services and administering communion. Thomas's life spanned a personal, nomadic and displaced wilderness journey ever-towards the Wales of his imagination, moving from the lowlands of north-east Wales where it borders England, to Manafon in upland Montgomeryshire, then to Eglwysfach in Ceredigion and to Aberdaron in the Llŷn peninsula, moving always

[10] 'Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples' Isa 8: 16
[11] In Chirk, his first parish where he served as Curate: 'It was here, for the first time, that he came face to face with the problem of pain. Some of the parishioners were very ill and required frequent visiting' Auto (1997) p43
[12] See 'Funeral' from Bread (1963)

from mainly English-speaking to mainly Welsh-speaking areas. He ended-up in the Llŷn peninsula where he could look to the past across 40 miles and 40 years to his boyhood.

Blake felt the presence of God calling him daily[13], and his commissioning to God's service was unremitting: the theme of Jerusalem, that of the 'Sleep' of 'Ulro'[14] and of the passage of man through 'Eternal Death' and of his awakening to 'Eternal Life' called Blake from his sleep night after night and woke him every morning at dawn[15].

Within the clear moments of call and commissioning lies the experience of compulsion, of being compelled to be what you are, to speak what you are given. Jeremiah testifies to being overpowered[16]. Hopkins testified to the compulsion which he felt as control or 'mastery' from God: 'THOU mastering me/God! Giver of breath and bread'[17] – God may give sustenance but in so doing he is the controller of Hopkins' life. Thomas too, bears witness to compulsion, speaking of the Welsh hill farmers, 'You will still continue ... To affront, bewilder, yet compel my gaze'[18], intimating that although he found it challenging to observe these people across the gap he perceived between himself and them, he literally could not tear his eyes away. Blake too, felt compelled by his Genius or Angel to follow where it led and he could not do otherwise - it was out of his power[19].

Being compelled to carry out one's vocation, being compelled to speak, is progressed through prophetic task, the goal of which is ultimately to

> Bring the soul of man to God.
> Make him fill the cradles right.[20]

Prophetic task is progressed by having the tongue of a teacher[21] and interceding on behalf of the people[22]. Jeremiah is designated a 'tester' and 'refiner' of the people so that he may 'know' and 'test' their ways[23] and is appointed as a 'prophet to the nations'[24], his task 'to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant'[25]. These

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[13] 'Notebook epigrams and satiric verses' c1808-12 Complete Poems (1977) p630
[14] 'Ur + low. The world of pure materialism and delusion, the basest condition to which Man can sink' Complete Poems (1977) p1056
[15] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 4 lines 1-4 Complete Poems (1977) p637
[16] Jeremiah 20:7-9; cf Amos 3:8 – "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?'. See also Jer 6:11 & 15:17; 25:30-31; and Num 22:38. Isaiah testifies: 'For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me' (Isa 8:11).
[17] 'The Wreck' Gardner (1967) No 28 p51 stanza 1.
[18] 'A Priest to His People' from Stones (1946)
[19] Letter to Trusler, August 16, 1799 from Erdman (1988) p701
[20] W B Yeats 'Under Ben Bulben' IV i Yeats Collected (1990) p399
[21] Isaiah 50:4
[22] See I Sam 12:19, 23; Jer 7:16, 42:1-4.
[23] Jeremiah 6:27
[24] Jeremiah 1:5
[25] Jeremiah 1:10; cf also Isa 42:18-20 where Yahweh's prophets are 'servants' and 'messengers'; also 'dedicated ones'.

involve purifying by passing judgement on mankind on behalf of Yahweh[26]. Hopkins' imperative to us to engage in a similar task of self-analysis and mastery, stands alongside his mission to conversion which involves the act of consciousness-raising. He attempts an 'opening' of sight and presents new perceptions which can lead to a re-orientation of understanding from which belief and faith can flow. Thomas's prophetic task is to be a vocal disciple of and witness to Christ: 'He ... saw love in a dark crown/Of thorns blazing, and a winter tree/Golden with fruit of a man's body'[27]. For Thomas, Christ is the cross which points both ways, highlighting the fact that his imperative to us is to make choices about journey and orientation within a spiritual geography. Blake saw his task as being a moral, spiritual, and political one which comprised a critique of society, nations, and individuals, but one which was actively engaged in proclamation (not prediction), and 'telling forth' (not divination). As such, his task was ultimately didactic. A summary of prophetic task which would 'fit' all of these disparate writers across time proposes that any prophet's duty is to teach man to fully use his powers of perception and to warn him against the worship of the lesser deities of his own momentary aims[28].

In this sense, it is the prophet's critical function comprising his critique of humanity and society, which is crucial in progression of a didactic task. The ancient prophets concerned themselves with the 'sins' that existed within human society, based on the belief that Yahweh had a relationship (covenant[29]) with his people comprising the contrary yet synonymous ideals of judgement and salvation. Hopkins' critical function analyses 'the stretching compass round'[30] - all things of earth and people[31] - in order to provide compass marks for 'orienteering' within a complex world. He gives us a question to answer: 'Where lies your landmark, seamark, or soul's star?'[32]. Within Thomas's critique, we the addressees are paradigmatic of the profane gamblers at the foot of Christ's ignored cross who went on with their dicing[33]. Thomas perceives a gap existing between the 'reality' of the heartlessness of these gamblers, and the love of a God who sacrifices himself on their behalf. For him life comprises 'the gap between/word and deed we try/narrowing with an

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[26] Yahweh says repeatedly he has sent his prophets but no-one listens: Amos 3:7; Hos 6:5, 12:10; Jer 7:25, 25:4; II Kings 17:13.
[27] 'In a Country Church' from Song (1955)
[28] Fisher (1961) p19
[29] See Jer 24:5-7 where the 'new' covenant is promised by Yahweh: 'and they shall be my people and I will be their God'. cf 'O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me' (Isa 48:18-19). Had the people remained faithful to the covenant they would have prospered, benefits ensue from adhering to the true 'relationship' with Yahweh, judgement falls if one does not.
[30] "The Escorial' Gardner (1967) No 1 p3
[31] Like the world that was 'Shewn to Ezekiel's open'd sight' whose 'ken through amber of dark eyes/Went forth to compass mysteries', see 'Il Mystico' Gardner (1967) No 77 p111 lines 48-52ff.
[32] 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People' Gardner (1967) No 157 p196
[33] 'Suddenly' from Laboratories (1975)

idea'[34], and his prophecy aims to provide us with the ideas by which we can close that gap. Blake seeks to search our interiors in order to expose and judge. Blake's salvific vision incorporates holistic notions of wholeness and unity, and in his concept of salvation, the rise from division, the denial of self, the reachievement of imaginative vision, and the descent and resurrection of Christ, are all merged[35].

Critical function can only be carried out within context. The prevailing political and social contexts of the prophetic texts were the frames of reference within which their messages of restoration, renewal and redemption involving changes of attitude and behaviour were proclaimed. Hopkins was reacting specifically to an event of his time when he wrote 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' using concrete detail[36] taken from newspaper reports. His service as missioner, parish priest and teacher in London, Oxford, Bedford Leigh near Manchester, St Francis Xavier in Liverpool, and St Joseph's in Glasgow, meant that he had direct experience of the serious adverse effects of industrialisation on people's lives. The context of the industrial revolution affected Hopkins, Thomas and Blake. Blake prefigures the industrial revolution and the effects of mechanisation on urban and rural life, but he is prophetic of it and its attendant evils. Hopkins witnesses to its reality in the city slums, whereas Thomas works within a context of 'aftershock' looking backward from a 20th century used to living with technology. The physical effects of industrialisation: poverty, squalor, hardship, exploitation, and physical and mental imprisonment which Blake envisaged, and Hopkins witnessed, move to spiritual and psychic effects in the 20th century, articulated by Thomas as an absence of God. Context for Thomas also means the loss and erosion[37] of the Welsh people, their culture and language, analysed through the lenses of history, myth, poetry and invasion, and Thomas sets these against the wider contextual world of movement, progress and change that threatens to consume.

The authority of the prophets is derived from the Lord, who puts his word in their mouths and appoints them over nations and over kingdoms with a remit to destroy and overthrow before they build and plant. As such, their authority is 'unacknowledged' in that it is unofficial and unsanctioned by any mortal institution[38]. The authority of Hopkins' writing,

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[34] 'Agnus Dei' from Mass (1992)
[35] Gleckner (1959) p42
[36] See also: 'Into the snows she sweeps,/Hurling the haven behind,/The Deutschland, on Sunday' (stanza 13)
[37] 'The rector began to write poetry longing for the old order, and for the poor and lonely life of the few who had remained ... But in addition a political element came into his poetry, together with a great deal of bitterness because of the English oppression' Auto (1997) p58
[38] As David Daiches observes: 'The tension between taught religious truth and personally encountered truth produces the special characteristics of certain kinds of religious poetry' David Daiches. God and The Poets. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. p88

his belief in himself and the authenticity of his poetry[39] rests upon control and mastery from God experienced as personal 'contact' or inspired (compelled) utterance[40]. Thomas believes in and articulates the authority of the ancient bards, viewing himself as being of their lineage: 'something in his song/Stopped me, held me; the bright harp/Was strung with fire, the music burned'[41]. The bard has the power to sow a seed in the brain[42]. Blake's authority to utter rests on his belief that conscience is one of the ways of knowing God: 'the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote'[43]. Authority is not endowed, but rather spoken *exousia,* out of their own beings. Their belief in themselves rests upon their function as observers, refiners, testers, in that they place us under judgement, the reader judged by the text. It is the authoritative tongue of a teacher and the authoritative eyes of a didactic watcher that work through them.

Within an authoritative vocation exists the prophetic reality of failure and ineffectuality of mission[44]. Many of the prophets were keenly aware that their missions from God were unlikely to succeed[45]. The idea of failure[46] ('I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity' Isa 49:4) was inherent but despite this they believed that God's word had to be spoken anyway ('yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God' Isa 49:4) for beyond them it had a life of its own that would accomplish much that they themselves could not see[47]. For Hopkins there is a personal recognition of failure, of efforts going astray and making no difference, of time passing and him being powerless to halt its flow, of being costive and unable to produce anything positive either written or in deed. He felt his life and task was 'a story/Of just, majestical, and giant groans'[48]. A keen feeling of failure also inheres in Thomas's relationship with Yahweh, which echoes the weary wrestling experience of Hopkins and the ancient

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[39] Hopkins' confidence in his own authoritative poetic utterance can be seen from his repudiation of Bridges' criticism re 'The Wreck': 'When a new thing, such as my ventures in the Deutschland are, is presented us our first criticisms are not our truest, best, most homefelt, or most lasting but what come easiest on the instant. They are barbarous and like what the ignorant and the ruck say. This was so with you' letter to Bridges from Stonyhurst College, Blackburn, May 13th 1878 from Poems and Prose (1963) pp178-9; cf also: "The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise. So it must be on every original artist to some degree, on me to a marked degree' Letter to Bridges from University College, Dublin, Sept 25th 1888 *ibid* p210

[40] cf Austin Farrer's comment in Lecture VIII: 'Poetry and divine inspiration have this in common, that both are projected in images which cannot be decoded, but must be allowed to signify what they signify of the reality beyond them … Inspiration does not merely stand at a midway point between poetry and metaphysics; it actively communicates with both … For inspiration teaches us about God, and God's existence is one of the mysteries which metaphysical discourse describes.' Farrer (1948) p148

[41] 'The Tree' from Land (1952)

[42] 'The Tree' *ibid*

[43] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Plate 12 'A Memorable Fancy' lines 9-10 Complete Poems (1997) p186

[44] Isa 49: 4, 53: 3; Jer 12:1, 15:10, 20:7; Ezek 3: 7; Hos 4: 5, 9: 8; Amos 2: 12, 7: 12; Zech 7: 11-12

[45] In human terms only; a true prophet will always succeed because fulfilling God's (hidden) purposes.

[46] An example of the immediate failure of a prophet's message occurs in Jeremiah 36 where King Jehoiakim cut up Jeremiah's scroll and put the pieces into his fire until the entire scroll was destroyed. This apparent failure of mission was overturned by Jeremiah who was instructed by Yahweh to re-write the scroll; the incident is metaphoric of failure and its transcendence, the message renewed in hope. See also Ex 4:1; Jer 1:8, 5:20-21, 7:27, 44:4-6; Ezek 2: 4-7; 3:7-11

[47] See Isa 55: 10-11; also Zech 1:3-6 where the prophets' words will live on beyond their own life spans.

[48] 'The shepherd's brow' Gardner (1967) No 75 p107

prophets: 'I would have knelt/long, wrestling with you, wearing/you down. Hear my prayer, Lord, hear/my prayer'[49]. Within a recognition of failure Blake sees himself as one of those who appear in one time, speaking of eternity: the work of Los, like that of Sisyphus, is a process of 'continually building & continually decaying desolate:/In eternal labours'[50]. Blake was to be disappointed in the reception of his poetry, but with perseverance continued to address the public anyway, even although they paid no attention.

Allied with the experience of failure and ineffectuality in mission is the ongoing faithfulness required to progress the task anyway, and there is a personal price to be paid: martyrdom is the consummation of prophecy[51]. Jeremiah understands this in his prayer to Yahweh: 'I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation' (Jer 15:17). The prophet is exiled and marginalised, displaced from 'normality' into wilderness territory in order to do the Lord's bidding. Hopkins recognised that within call to vocation resided personal trial and suffering[52]. He chose a life of sacrifice, and through that, praise[53], as he endeavoured to be an exemplar or sacramental sign of the belief that he wished to pass on to others. Thomas knew the cost for his own faithfulness, believing later in life that his prayers had been of no use and his faith had failed[54]. He felt frustrated with his parishioners[55] believing it was useless speaking of things of the spirit to people who lived an extraordinary hardship on a daily basis[56]. Blake uses the personality of Los to articulate the personal cost of faithfulness to vocation, portraying his own role as marginalised prophet: 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness'[57]. It is for Albion's sake that Blake becomes to others a horror and an astonishment[58]. All of the poets here discussed experience vocation as a costly journey that is nomadic and singular. They have no abiding city; marginalised and displaced to an 'edge' existence, they must devise a theology of place that seeks to integrate man (and themselves) within a wider universe.

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[49] 'Emerging' from Laboratories (1975)
[50] Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 53 lines 19-20 Complete Poems (1997) p740
[51] 'Many prophets have passed through their career as prophets without being martyrs; but no one has ever suffered and died as a Martyr without being a Prophet' William Maccall. The Agents of Civilization. London: John Green, 1843. p96
[52] Not only personal suffering, but being close to the suffering of others. 'Felix Randal' shows Hopkins doing his duty which ends once Felix dies, the human contact inherent within vocation an important two-way relationship, and by example Hopkins was showing in what ways one can have an influence over another's experience of life (and death).
[53] Within the idea of sacrifice is *sacrum facere* – to make sacred, involving gift-giving.
[54] 'I have seen/my prayers fall one by one/into that chasm, and faith/was a plank too narrow/for me to tread' 'Space Walking' from Residues (2002)
[55] 'Some of them would have to walk a mile or more to church, and when the time came for him to climb into the pulpit they were starting to doze' Auto (1997) p59
[56] 'What use was it speaking of the life of the spirit to people who lacked some of the normal amenities of the life of the middle classes?' Auto (1997) p52
[57] See **Figure 1** 'The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness' Frontispiece All Religions Are One Thames & Hudson (2000) p18
[58] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 8 lines 18-19 Complete Poems (1997) p647

They progress this aim by way of the inspired revelations they seek to pass on to us. The prophets' inspirations come from outwith themselves, out of the blue, unsought[59]. One prophet (I Kings 13:20) receives the word of the Lord whilst sitting at the dinner table whereas Jeremiah has to wait 10 days before receiving the Lord's word (Jer 42:7)[60]. The revelation which Hopkins seeks to pass on is his vision of a world which contains 'God, three-numberèd form'[61]. His poems extol such presence as an interior 'pressure' or 'principle' that is the fiery energy of Yahweh 'charging' all things, Hopkins revealing content rather than external form. Thomas's inspired revelation of God is that He comprises the same 'double nature' of the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible. Throughout his poetics Thomas maintains, with Blake, that God is God of both 'Tyger'[62] and 'lamb' who holds us at bay with his symbols, the 'opposed emblems' of hawk and dove. Thomas as our representative, asks on our behalf: 'How can I/find God? Out there?/He is absent. In here?/He is dumb'[63]. God is the void we must be willing to enter[64], even although our experience of him is that he is before us, and always leaving as we arrive[65]. Blake repeatedly testified to his direct experience of inspiration, believing that this provided him with proof of his call to task and his commissioning from God. He saw the inspiration which artists have as being the breath or spirit of God which dwells within them, and that such inspiration is the only proof we have of the existence of a spiritual power greater than ourselves: art is 'the gift of God, the Holy Ghost'[66].

The prophets' insightedness is based on gifted vision; they are primarily poets of vision, of things seen and things underlying. Compare Ezekiel's visions of the glory of God in Ezekiel I, Isaiah's parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, and Amos's visions of the plumbline and the basket of summer fruit (Amos 7 & 8). In this respect Hopkins' way of looking, his sight and his insightedness, are revelatory as he attempts to endow us with new sight. The special 'visual compulsion' of the 'Just seen' is what Hopkins wishes to pass on, not the 'other eyes' common to his 'every peer'[67], for when the rainbow shines, it does so 'only in the thought/Of him that looks'. Hopkins emphasises that every eye perceives differently: 'many standing round a waterfall/See one bow each, yet not the same to all'[68]. Thomas's physical eyes are crucial to an understanding of his poetics for they are the media for both sight and understanding, for it is *how* we look that determines *what* we see. If one uses

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[59] See a characteristic experience of this in Ezekiel 8:1-4; also Isaiah 8:11ff.
[60] See also Jer 28:12.
[61] See 'The Wreck' stanza 9 Gardner (1967) p54
[62] Thomas echoes Blake with his own version of 'the tyger' in 'The White Tiger' from Frequencies (1978)
[63] 'Beauty is ill' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[64] 'He is that' from 'AD' section of Counterpoint (1990)
[65] 'Pilgrimages' from Between (1981)
[66] A Descriptive Catalogue Erdman (1988) p46
[67] See 'To Oxford' Gardner (1967) No 12, p21
[68] 'It was a hard thing to undo this knot' Gardner (1967) No 91, p129

'brute eyes' one will only see 'brutish' things[69]. Eyes are what cross the gap, they are the media to holistic 'closure', they identify the things that integrate or separate, that unite or divide. The poet and his words are translators of sight, wording the effective sparks which cross the gap and connect the current between the 'seer' and the thing seen. Blake observes 'All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone, all/Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied/Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours'[70]. He views mankind's struggle as a crucial component of the movement of the wider universe in space and time and offers us visions to bring light to our darkness because we, like the blind and aged Tiriel, are 'Blind to the pleasures of the sight & deaf to warbling birds'[71].

Poets of persuasion, opposition, and protest, require rhetorical language if they are to be didactic. The language of the biblical prophets is concentrated and specifically designed to ensure that the people understand ('see') what they say[72], yet the oracles are obscure, have a self-protective quality as they resist definitive interpretation, rendering them a lasting evocation rather than an immediately-decipherable shallow perception. Biblical prophetic utterance is complex and interwoven, visual metaphor being a crucial device of explanation rather like the parable form[73] but this can be interpreted in many ways, rendering the oracle lively, elusive and ultimately indefinable. The overriding intent of the texts is that of rhetorical persuasion[74].

Hopkins' well-wrought and mastered language is also poetry of rhetorical persuasion. Beauty for Hopkins means moral, inner beauty that comes from correct choices made and correct will 'strained'[75] to that choice. He finds his 'beauty' in the poetic line and carefully-spaced sound-sequences[76]; his tightly-knit and tightly-structured poetics is a poetic of mastery which imposes harmony from without by way of rhyme-scheme or sonnet form, or rules of stress and emphasis. Hopkins ensures strong rhythms by using 'sprung' rhythm, comprising emphatic stresses on first syllables that provide an underlying rhythmic beat beneath syllabic variability and inconstancy. This ensures both stability and continuity

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[69] 'On a Portrait' in Stones (1946)
[70] Jerusalem Chapter 4 Plate 99 lines 57-61 Complete Poems (1997) p847
[71] Tiriel 4 line 29 Complete Poems (1997) p94
[72] And this is required because 'They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand' Isa 44:18
[73] See Isa 28: 23-29; also Isa 5:1-7
[74] The poetic and aesthetic cast of the texts work to service the religious viewpoint, and the texts make claims to truth regarding history, the prophets, the world, the behaviour of the populace and their rulers, and the nature of God. The poetic language imaginatively 're-presents' the contemporary Hebrew world to our eyes and in general is 'performative' – a language of action, for action is theologically paradigmatic. See Sean McEvenue's comment: 'Scripture is not a source for answers to current questions. Rather, one listens to Scripture on its own terms, as a discipline towards intellectual, moral, and religious conversion': Interpretation 35 (1981) p240
[75] 'he/Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty' "The Eurydice' lines 77-78 Gardner (1967) p74
[76] Fragments of 'Floris in Italy' (iii) Gardner (1967) No 102 p143

underpinning emotional flux. Thomas's poetic is not strongly accentual, but relies rather on delicate tension of phrase encompassing rhymeless, infrequently end-stopped lines that are usually fewer than nine syllables. His poetry is 'like a briskly descending brook'[77]. In line with the prophets, and Hopkins, Thomas's concern is to jolt us out of complacency, to de-familiarise or 'shake and unset our morticed metaphors', to provide us with verbal dexterity that will claim our attention and enable us to follow him with new eyes in his journey towards transfiguration. Blake's prophetic 'forthtelling' is communicated through a deliberate rhetoric of Spiritual Verse, 'order'd & measur'd'[78]. Blake conceives of this in structural terms as a building with its own ordered and measured foundations and pillars of support, and he marshals his verse as for a battle: 'Hearing the march of long resounding strong heroic Verse/Marshalld in order for the day of Intellectual Battle'[79].

The purpose of prophetic rhetoric is to witness to the times, and persuade of change. Poetry performs a prophetic function when it witnesses to historical (contextual) reality and to ahistorical (eternal) possibility. Through the messages[80] of the prophetic texts we have a record of deeds and encounters between nations and individuals. The prophets are witnesses to certain actual periods in time as their historical contexts show, but they are also witnesses to the deeds of humanity on a generic level and in this latter sense, provide ahistorical witness to human behaviour which can be accessed and analysed in any age with respect to corporate and personal choices. The Hebrew language expresses future events by the past tense, or rather by the perfect present, as if they had actually taken place, and by contrast, expresses past events by the future, as if immediately or soon to happen. This makes future prediction (foretelling or divining) and exposition of the present and past (forthtelling) difficult to distinguish one from the other, for all tenses are indeterminate and open to interpretation. Hopkins' prophetic witness analyses the quotidian *sub specie aeternitatis*. His poetry of social witness is to *chronos* within *kairos*: he witnesses to a specific point in time whilst expressing the ahistorical abandonment of time through the reality of the living Christ. He testifies to the nineteenth century contextual arena within which he was situated, but also witnesses to politics, employment and disempowerment across time as ongoing realities within human experience, expressed in such paradigmatic poems as 'Harry Ploughman', 'Tom's Garland' and 'Felix Randal'.

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[77] See Bedient (1974) p54

[78] Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 48 lines 5-8 Complete Poems (1997) p730

[79] Vala, or The Four Zoas Night the First lines 2-3 Complete Poems (1997) p274

[80] 'Meaning' stems from the symbiotic relationship between writer (text) and reader – the words have meaning across time because re-interpreted afresh with fresh eyes; words maintaining their 'value' in a transhistoric sense despite being the product of a specific person in a specific time. Interpretation by the reader colludes with the production of meaning, keeping a text valid and alive - thus its 'value' does not disappear just because the original creator and context have disappeared. Through the experience of text the reader is transformed as s/he brings a new 'event horizon' to the text birthing a new and unique interpretation.

Hopkins foregrounds the Scotist tradition which sees true being in life and nature as reflective of an eternal Christ: Christ is exemplified by each thing being what it properly is. By perceiving life around us in this way we can, in all times, glean Christ from what we see and experience. Thomas witnesses to the link between the earthly and the heavenly, and seeks to create an holistic vision of cosmos and universe that conflates microcosmic and macrocosmic imagery: 'I have worn my soul bare/On the world's roads, seeking what lay/Too close for the mind's lenses to see,/And come now with the first stars/Big on my lids'[81]. He witnesses to what is ahistorical, to what has gone behind and will go before, a perspective which *removes* the quotidian and realigns vision towards the eternal. Blake not only witnessed to the time period in which he lived but also witnessed to humanity in an ahistorical sense: 'No period of history is very remote when seen through the eyes of a poet'[82]. Blake held a strong belief in the transhistorical value of all great art, believing that it could speak to the condition of Man which moved in cycles and continually required re-adjustment or re-alignment in order to bring him closer to wisdom and truth. Man required saving because he was always falling: 'now the times are return'd upon thee ... Loud howls the eternal Wolf: the eternal Lion lashes his tail!'[83].

Prophetic poets attempt to break through any rigidity of containment or classification, in order to show us the possibility for both expansion and limitlessness. Poetic words are intended to 'arouse all possible echoes'[84], not close us up in mental boxes: 'The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and with our judgement perdue behind the curtain'[85]. One theologian comments that in the study of scripture, with regard to our response to it as text (and as poetry), 'it is the element in which [one's] own mind moves which overflows on the meaning of the text'[86]. The text reads us because as we read it, we ourselves are revealed (and changed). This process becomes one of self-revelation, but the depth to which we see depends upon us[87]: 'There are difficulties of another kind in many parts of

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[81] 'When I stand at night and look towards the stars, and think of the galaxies that stretch one after the other to oblivion ... I am ... someone who, partaking of contemporary knowledge, can still wonder at the Being that keeps it all in balance' Auto (1997) p145; cf 'Absolution' from Poetry (1958)
[82] Gillham (1966) p1
[83] America Plate 9 line 19 & 27 Complete Poems (1997) pp214-5
[84] Farrer (1948) p120
[85] Coleridge Biographia Literaria (1983) Ch 23 p218
[86] John Drury. Ed. Critics of the Bible 1724-1873. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Jowett p142
[87] cf Tolstoy: 'Seriozha came in, preceded by his governess. Had Karenin cared to, he might have noticed the timid, lost look which the child cast first at his father and then at his mother. But he was unwilling to see anything and so saw nothing' Anna Karenin. Tr. Rosemary Edmonds. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1954. p224; cf Thomas: 'One headland looks at another headland. What/one sees must depend on where one stands, when/one stands' The Echoes Return Slow (1988) 'One headland' p70

Scripture, the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself'[88].

All of the poets here discussed are prophetic in their desire to lead us into the maze of ourselves and confront the Minotaur that is humanity's 'Spectre' of selfishness, cruelty, indifference, and deliberate evil: 'The best journey to make/is inward. It is the interior/that calls'[89]. The ends of the didactic strings they hold out to us, to guide us there, inwards to our own hearts, may lead us in to the centre, but the strings of words, images, visions, ways of seeing, perceiving, followed by our choosing, doing, being, if we pick them up, are simultaneously the way back from darkness, which we, with renewed knowledge and understanding can follow in order to lead us out to the light.

The Biblical prophets, followed by Hopkins, Thomas, and Blake, to name but three ancestors or inheritors, invite us in to the maze therefore, to explore, negotiate, orientate[90] ourselves within ourselves, but they also offer a way of redemption: their resolving vision attempts always to 'transfigure' the commonplace by redeeming the quotidian moment with its Minute but crucial Particulars. The reality which these prophets present – their golden strings – is the didactic mirror they hold up to ourselves so that we can truly see our own faces. When we know and understand what we are, where we have been, how we have come, then we will be able to change, and in our own idiosyncratic and unique ways become individually responsible to and for community life: 'So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts'[91].

The journey into the maze, following the strings these prophets hold out to us as imperatives, may be a singular one, but that singular journey of discovery and exploration is the single necessary brick that, in concert with millions of other bricks, will help to rebuild and restore our communal world[92], the 'New Jerusalem' which is always in process of

> Becoming a building of pity and compassion? Lo!
> The stones are pity and the bricks, well wrought affections:
> Enameld with love & kindness, & the tiles engraven gold
> Labour of merciful hands: the beams & rafters are forgiveness:
> The mortar & cement of the work, tears of honesty: the nails,

[88] Drury (1989) Jowett p144
[89] Thomas 'Groping' from Frequencies (1978)
[90] 'God is that great absence/In our lives, the empty silence/Within, the place where we go/Seeking' Thomas 'Via Negativa' from Frequencies (1978)
[91] II Peter 1: 19-21
[92] See Micah 7: 2-3 to see what the prophets fight against.

> And the screws & iron braces, are well wrought blandishments,
> And well contrived words, firm fixing, never forgotten,
> Always comforting the remembrance: the floors, humility,
> The ceilings, devotion: the hearths, thanksgiving[93]

Blake gives us an imperative: 'Go on, builders in hope: tho Jerusalem[94] wanders far away,/Without the gate of Los: among the dark Satanic wheels'[95]. What he exhorts us to heed is the same didactic message that all of the prophets, ancient and modern, have left us: that the way of our salvation is to follow their advice by following Los through the door of death into the maze that is our mortal, perishable world, to explore and illumine the darkness there with our own precious, gifted, solar light[96]:

> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a ball:
> It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
> Built in Jerusalems wall[97]

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[93] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 12 lines 29-37; cf also Chapter 1 Plate 24 lines 17-25 and also Milton Book the First Plate 28 lines 44-60

[94] The New Jerusalem will be the home of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, and will not be limited or contained by real walls: Zechariah 2: 1-5 – instead it will be a state of mind and heart, a state of orientation and behaviour, an internal Eden.

[95] Jerusalem Chapter 1 Plate 12 lines 43-44 Complete Poems (1997) p656

[96] cf: 'Come on! Come on! Come on! The Lord/Jehovah is before, behind, above, beneath, around/He has builded the arches of Albions Tomb binding the Stars/In merciful Order, bending the Laws of Cruelty to Peace … Building the Body of Moses in the Valley of Peor: the Body/Of Divine Analogy' Jerusalem Chapter 2 Plate 49 lines 52-58 – God is literally within the fabric of the building, sustaining it, and within the fabric of life itself (cf inner fire/instress of Hopkins); Moses as representative human, and it is *our bodies* God builds from within: 'If you Forgive one-another, so shall Jehovah Forgive You:/That He Himself may Dwell among You' Jerusalem Chapter 3 Plate 61 lines 25-26

[97] Jerusalem Plate 77 'To the Christians'

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I sung of Chaos and eternal Night,
Taught by the heavenly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend,
Though hard and rare ...

... long is the way
And hard, that out of hell leads up to light

Milton
Paradise Lost
III 18-21 & II 432-433